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**CONTEXT, DISCOURSE AND KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION  
IN  
PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

The study describes the interconnection of context, discourse and knowledge construction in pragmatic analysis. Using relevant theoretical concepts, principles and procedures from existing literature on the topic and data from oral, written and intuitive sources for exemplification, the paper examines the content of subjective, intersubjective and interactive knowledge in knowledge construction and how this is connected with contextual information in the production and reception of discourse in pragmatic communication. Reviewing the current approaches in pragmatics analysis, the paper contends that pragmatics scholars in Nigeria can provide original alternative theories to conceptualisations from the West by utilising data for research from indigenous contexts in the local languages and second language usage of English to initiate and expound fresh concepts from linguistics and social theory without necessary recourse to pre-existing euro-centric concepts. The paper concludes that pragmatics enables scholars and students of linguistics to understand the processes, principles and procedures guiding the interpretation of socio-cultural and contextual meanings of utterances and that pragmatic methods are needed if we want a fuller, deeper and generally more reasonable account of human language behaviour.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, context, discourse, knowledge construction, Nigeria.

**Introduction**

The first three concepts in the topic of this paper are intertwined and entailed in one another such that describing one invokes the meaning of the other. For example, context can be explained as 'knowledge of discourse' or 'discourse of knowledge'; knowledge as 'discourse in context' or 'context of discourse'; and discourse as 'knowledge in context' or 'context of knowledge.' Apart from 'pragmatic analysis,' which the other concepts can be linked to, given our concern of this paper, the other concepts can really not be discussed in a pecking order without justification. A convenient but reasonable order for presentation of the concepts is that of etymology (etymonline.com 2002). In this regard, 'knowledge' comes first, followed by 'discourse' and 'context.'

### **Knowledge: Etymology and Philosophical Sources**

Knowledge or cognition is variously called representation, denotation and ideation in psychology, philosophy and linguistics; cognate terms include understanding, comprehension interpretation, reasoning, thought and experience. The meaning of knowledge in the 12c. was “acknowledge of a superior, honour, worship” and from the 14c. “capacity for knowing, understanding, familiarity, awareness of a fact, ... news, notice, information, learning, etc.”. The study of the nature and sources of knowledge is the subject matter of epistemology in philosophy; two schools of thought emerge in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18 centuries debate about what knowledge is, the rationalists and empiricists. The rationalists, whose major proponents are Rene Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz and Baruch Spinoza believe that knowledge derives from reason or thought, while the empiricists, such as John Locke, George Berkeley, Francis Bacon and David Hume, believe that knowledge is derived from experience through the senses. To the rationalists, knowledge is a priori and deductive, while it is posteriori and inductive to the empiricists. The rationalism and empiricism debate form the bases of research activities in the sciences and humanities today. For example, the mentalist and behaviourist concepts provide vocabulary for describing knowledge states and processes as follows:

Rationalist/mentalist: cognition, learn, know, comprehend, remember, forget, memory and intelligence, etc.

Empiricist/behaviourist: motivation, attitude, intention, desire, consciousness, intention, attention, disposition and feeling, etc.

Also, the deductive and inductive distinction provides the 'Top-Down' and 'Bottom-Up' strategies of information processing and knowledge ordering (Quora, 2015; Odebunmi, 2018). For example, applying a Top-Down approach to our description here would start from 'pragmatic analysis' at the top and work downwards to the constituents of knowledge, discourse and context (cf. the approach of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) in discourse analysis); but we are moving from the smaller concepts up to the general one at the top in this presentation (cf. the approach of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's approach (1974) in conversation analysis).

### **Constituents of Knowledge**

Knowledge is constituted by knowledge of the world, language and context, which constitutes background knowledge in pragmatics or discourse analysis. Human cognition of the world, which is the concern of cognitive studies, includes knowledge of living and non-living things as participants, human and non-human, concrete objects and abstract phenomena. It includes all processes or practices – action, sensing, relating, behaving and saying. It further includes all qualities such as colour, sizes, shapes, comparisons and so on and also circumstances such as place, time, manner reason and condition. Any aspect(s) of human cognition above can be described in cognitive studies using relevant theoretical frameworks. World knowledge, in form of ideas, thoughts and experiences, are represented in language through speech and

writing. Sealey and Carter (2004) write that languages are emergent products of the engagement of human practice with the material world and that they possess the ability to interact with their constituent elements – people, the material world and language. The character of language in pragmatic analysis is such that warrants the appellation of 'discourse' that is discussed below.

The third constituent of knowledge in communication is 'context'. The centrality of 'context' in pragmatics is apparent right from the conception of 'pragmatics' as 'meaning in context'; that is, the conditions “under which utterances may be said to be felicitous” (Archer and Grundy 2011:2). Context is an abstract category in discourse analysis utilised to provide links between linguistic items and the verbal, physical, social and cultural situation of communication. More discussion of context will come up later in this paper.

### **Knowledge Construction**

Information on how human beings construct knowledge comes from different fields such as philosophy, psychology, linguistics, cognitive studies, artificial intelligence and computer simulation. Three aspects of knowledge construction are considered here, viz. subjective, inter-subjective and interactional knowledge. Subjective knowledge describes knowledge structures in the individual's brain and mind, while intersubjective knowledge describes the extension of knowledge beyond individuals outside the context of communication; and interactive knowledge takes place in communication in context. The aspects are interwoven in communicative interaction, thus making clear-cut demarcations very difficult. Our presentation of some relevant categories of cognitive structures under subjectivity and inter-subjectivity below are thus detached from their relationship to language/discourse and context for academic purposes. The intention is that the same concepts detached here can become interactive in social contexts of communication.

### **Subjective Knowledge/Subjectivity**

Certain terms originate from cognitive psychology, social psychology and artificial intelligence for describing the structure of knowledge in individuals such as schemata, frame, script, stance, point of view and positioning. Schemata (plural of schema) refer to how assumptions, beliefs and ideas are stored in long-term memory and activated in response to communication demands (Cook 1989, Pilkington 2000). Eysenck and Keane (2010:401), cited by Ogoanah (2017) describe schemata as “well-integrated pockets of knowledge about the world, events, people and actions”. A schema denotes items of knowledge that are associated with an object, person, event, action, place, etc. It is said that items of knowledge that relate to an object are stored close to one another in the brain so that the choice of a topic activates several items of knowledge that are related to the topic. For example, in lexical terms, the schema of a house will include 'windows, roof, rooms, furniture' and other related concepts such as 'build, live and sleep'. Also, the knowledge of 'car' activates such items as 'driver, drive and journey'.

Storage of items is multifaceted, such that items may be related in terms of sounds, syntactic pattern, words or genres.

Frame is a word used to describe a cognitive model that links together separate entities in our mind. Lakoff (2004) defines frames as mental structures that shape the way we see the world and are triggered by words (cf. Bloor and Bloor 2007). They are part of the unconscious mind and operate automatically to help us make sense of the world. Goffman (1974) claims that people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. Frames can be designed to enhance understanding or are used as cognitive short cuts to link stories to the bigger picture. Frames not only focus on issues or objects but also examine their relative salience (Weaver 2007). Goffman (1974) states that two distinctions are further made within the primary framework: natural and social framework. The natural framework identifies events as physical occurrences taking natural quote literally and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events; and social framework views events as socially driven occurrences due to the whims, goals and manipulations on the part of other social players.

Schank and Abelson (1977) use scripts in artificial intelligence work as a method of representing procedural knowledge ('knowledge of how' instead of 'knowledge of what'). In their work, scripts are very much like frames, except that the values that fill the slots must be ordered. A script is a structured representation describing a stereotyped sequence of actions that define a well-known situation and has associated with it. The assumptions are that understanding a situation means having been in that situation before (at least for conventional ones); understanding is knowledge-based; knowledge is highly structured; a large part of knowledge is script based; and that knowledge can be specific (script-based) or general. Schank and Abelson (1977) argue that understanding language involves causally connected thoughts/sentences and because causality is often implied or incompletely described, it is usually harder to understand connected text than individual sentences. Scripts are used in natural language understanding systems to organise a knowledge base in terms of the situations that the system should understand. For example, the typical sequence of events that occur when a person drinks in a restaurant is finding a seat, reading the menu, ordering drinks from the wait staff, etc. In the script form, these would be decomposed into conceptual transitions, such as MTRANS and PTRANS (mental transitions (of information) and physical transitions (of things)).

One more concept that we shall describe here under subjective knowledge, for the purpose of coherence, is 'stance' (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan 1999,

Chindamo, Allwood and Ahlsen 2012), although the same concept can be considered inter-subjectively in interactive communication (Karkkainen 2003, Dubois 2007, Scheibman 2007, Osunbade 2016). Indeed, Dubois (2007:139) writes thus:

Stance can be approached as a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and social value ... As we seek the theoretical resources needed to account for the achievement of stance, we find ourselves faced with a complex web of interconnection linking stance with dialogicality, intersubjectivity, the social actors who jointly enact stance, and the mediating frameworks of linguistic structure and sociocultural values they invoke in doing so.

Stance is a linguistic construct that marks attitudes in communication. Dubois (2007) identifies three kinds of stance as evaluative, positioning (combining affective and epistemic positioning) and alignment (an inter-subjective stance); positioning here refers to the act of situating a social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value. However, Osunbade (2016) identifies four types of stance which he relates to politeness maxims in acknowledgements: epistemic stance, which indicates the commitment of the speaker to the amount of certainty or possibility resident in a proposition; evidential stance, which indicates the source of the knowledge expressed and the speaker-based evidence for the claim or assertion made; evaluative stance, which describes the judgement of specific socio-culturally determined attributes expressed by the speaker; and affective stance, which describes the emotion expressed by the speaker. The linguistic resources that express stance include deixis, references, modals, adverbials, pre-modifying adverbs, complement clauses, verbs, adjectives, nouns and noun phrases, yes or no questions, tag questions, reported speech, passivisation, code switching, tone of voice, loudness and duration. Stance modality features, for example, reveal two kinds of speaker orientation to discourse, the epistemic and deontic modalities, whereby the former utilises linguistic features to express possibility and necessity with regard to knowledge and the latter expresses permission and obligation (Krause 2006).

#### **Inter-subjective Knowledge/ Inter-subjectivity**

Dubois (2007) describes inter-subjectivity as the relation between one actor's subjectivity and another's. He observes that inter-subjectivity presupposes subjectivity; but while subjectivity has been getting a fair share of the attention lately, being recognised for its role in the cognitive organisation of language structure, intersubjectivity is no less indispensable as a piece of larger concepts of cognition. Dubois (2007) contends that the significance between the necessary link between the intersubjective, subjective and objective will become evident once we recognise them as fundamental socio-cognitive relations which organise language use. Under this topic we examine the inter-subjective bases of the concepts of presupposition, entailment, inference, intention, explicature and implicature and relevance as cognitive structures. Although the concepts are strongly linked with language activities, they are

principally human-oriented phenomena. Sealey and Carter (2004) say that although language has properties and causal powers, they do not dominate human beings; it is human beings, with complex and conflicting interests, who employ language to do things in the social world.

### **Presupposition and Entailment**

Presupposition, refers to 'assumption of knowledge', a means of avoiding redundancy by containing information not expressed. Participants in a communication are able to interact efficiently because they share some knowledge of the world which normally, they do not repeat in the communication (Kempson 1977, Wilson 1975, Yule 1996). When a speaker assumes that the hearer has knowledge of particular information, he/she either omits the information totally from his/her message or expresses it by means of presupposing items. Such items include the pronouns 'he/she/it/they' and the article 'the', which refers to items mentioned previously or assumed in an utterance. Let us look at the expressions below:

- Ex. 1a. The book you wrote is very interesting. (Assertion)  
b. When did you write that interesting book? (Question)  
c. Make sure everybody read that interesting book you wrote. (Command)  
d. What an interesting book you wrote! (Exclamation)

All the examples 'a-d' above carry the presuppositions that: i. There was a book. ii. The book was interesting. iii. The addressee wrote a book. Here is another example:

Ex. 2. I am the youngest male child of my parents.

The utterance presupposes that: i. My parents have more than three children. ii. My parents have both male and female children. iii. My parents have a female child or female children who are younger than me.

Yule (1996) identifies different types of presupposition with examples based on some indicators as existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual. While presupposition is often treated as the relationship between two propositions, entailment is the relationship between two sentences where the truth of one (A) requires the truth of the other (B). Here are some examples of entailment for the expression below (interpretation depends on the word emphasised by the speaker):

- Ex. 3. The man did not buy the car.  
· There was a man ... (Emphasis on 'the' before 'man')



- It was not a woman ... (Emphasis on 'man')
- Did something else, e.g. 'negotiate' or 'like' the car (Emphasis on 'buy')
- May have bought another car. (Emphasis on 'the' before 'car') ·  
Bought something else, e.g. a bike, but not a car. (Emphasis on 'car').

Any sentence S1 will entail sentence S2 if when S1 is true, S2 is also true; for example,

Ex. 4. Mrs Aliu teaches English language. (S1) Mrs Aliu is a teacher. (S2)

The truth of S1 implies the truth of S2. However, if S1 is false, S2 can either be true or false; that is, Mrs Aliu may not teach English Language but can be or cannot be a teacher. Furthermore, if S2 is false, S1 will also be false; that is, if Mrs Aliu is not a teacher, she cannot teach English Language.

Some scholars have attempted to distinguish between presuppositions and entailment in two ways. First, presupposition is a relation between propositions and speakers have it, not sentences. In contrast, entailment is a relation between sentences and sentences, not speakers, have it. A second difference is the observation that presupposition reveals 'constancy under negation' (Yule 1996, Xu 2009). For example, the proposition in Ex. 5 does not change even if the statement is negated (Ex. 6) or there is disagreement with it (Ex. 7):

Ex. 5 a. Mary's dog is cute. (Symbolically represented as P)  
b. Mary has a dog. (Symbolically represented as Q)  
c.  $P > Q$  (> means presupposes)

Ex. 6. a. Mary's dog isn't cute. (NOT P)  
b. Mary has a dog. (Q)  
c. NOT P > Q

Ex. 7. a. Everybody knows that John is a thief. (P)  
b. Everybody doesn't know that John is a thief. (NOT P)  
c. John is gay. (Q)  
d.  $P > Q$  & NOT P > Q

### **Inference, Intention, Explicature, Implicature and Relevance**

An important means by which language users avoid redundancies in their communication is their ability to make inferences from utterances. An addressee in a piece of communication makes inferences by drawing from an utterance a meaning that is not expressed by an addresser in the utterance. Such inferences are based on

previous knowledge that the addressee had pertaining to the utterances made. Since an inference is made by guessing, it may be right or wrong. Consider the utterance:

Ex. 8. Malik: I knew the girl we are talking about before I met you.

Ada: You mean you befriended her before? But you told me you never had a girlfriend.

Malik: She was just a friend, just like you are now.

Ada: Are we mere friends?

Malik: Yes, until you accept my proposal.

Ada: There you go again with your jokes.

The concept of inference in the interpretation of intentions has been a dominant feature in the cognitive philosophical school or Anglo-American pragmatics, initiated by Austin (1962) and in the distinction between 'constative' and 'performative' verbs, 'direct and indirect acts and the focus on the classification of 'illocutionary acts of speech'. Searle (1969, 1975) later develops speech act theory by describing constitutive rules that guide the felicitous performance of illocutionary acts and proposes a taxonomy of speech acts.

The proposal of the cooperative principle and associated maxims of conversation and the attendant concepts of 'implicature' (conventional meaning), 'explicature' (speaker meaning) and 'relevance' occupy the attention of Grice (1975, 1989), Adegbite (1999), Sperber and Wilson (1986, Wilson and Sperber 2012, Wilson 2017) and Neo-Gricean pragmatics in the attempt to describe the general rules governing rational, cooperative human behaviour underlying the inter-subjective and socio-cognitive interpretation of cognitive intention in communication. The followers of Austin and Grice have taken the theories to be well established and, indeed, they have served as paradigms for research in pragmatics. But seemingly insurmountable difficulties abound in them in terms of conceptualisation of terms, universal application and contextual relevance (Thomas 1995, Davis 1998, Pinker 2007, Saul 2010). Similar limitations apply to early formulations of the politeness theory by Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) and impoliteness theory by Culpeper (1996) in Post-Gricean pragmatics (Spencer-Oatey 1992, Mills 2003, Locher and Watts 2005, Locher and Bousfield 2008).

### **Interactive Knowledge/ Interactivism**

Interactive knowledge goes beyond inter-subjective or socio-cognitive knowledge in the perception that meaning or intention is negotiated between speaker and listener in communication rather a speaker expressing an intention and a listener attempting to interpret it. In this respect, negotiation takes place in a defined context of communication. Odebunmi (2018) writes that European-Continental pragmatics takes an equivocal position on intention that it is not necessarily present in communication. Quoting Verschueren (1999: 48), "... it will be unwise to claim that every type of communicated meaning is dependent on a definable intention on the part of the

utterer”, He (2018: Slide 13) remarks that the European-Continental school largely conceives of intention “as a post facto participant resource that emerges through interaction”. Kecskes (2017:7) emphasises that there is a dialectical relationship between a priori intention (based on individual prior experience – declarative) and emergent intention (based on actual situational context - procedural).

Examples of a few pragmatics researches that are interactive may be cited at this juncture (cf. Odebunmi 2018). Mey (2001) conceptualises the 'pragmeme' as the representation of possible pragmatic features: activity + (con) textual parts. Its distinctive intervention is the *pract*, and/or *allopract*, which defines the situatedness of the speech act version advanced by the theory. Extension of socio-cognitive perspectives of politeness and face theories includes the consideration of politeness as conversational contract (Fraser 1978, Fraser and Nolen 1978), Spencer-Oatey's (1992) cross-cultural politeness and rapport management (2000), Locker and Watts (2005) politeness and relational work, Locher and Bousfield's (2008) and Bousfield and Locher's (2008) impoliteness as an interplay with power and practice, Terkourafi (2008) and Culpeper's (2009, 2011) impoliteness in contexts and Arundale's (1999, 2006 and 2010) face constituting theory. More works include those on intercultural and cross-cultural pragmatics (Thomas 1983, Tannen 1984 and Moeschler 2004 and Wierzbicka 2006); with 'intercultural' referring to the norms of same language in different cultural contexts and cross-cultural referring to norms of different languages in different cultures.

Locher and Graham (2010) describes interpersonal pragmatics as a coalescence of theoretic insights from relational work, rapport management, face constituting theory and impoliteness research. It deals with how “social actors use language to shape and form relationships (p.1). It also emphasises “relational, attitudinal/emotive and evaluative aspects of embodied language use” (Haugh, Kadar and Mills 2013:3). I will quote Wierzbicka a little bit more from her apt comments in the *Pragmatics Encyclopedia* and summarise the comments of another scholar on the topic. First Wierzbicka (in Mey 2009:396) writes thus:

Thus, the author had to learn to avoid overusing not only "of course" but also many other expressions dictated by her Polish cultural scripts; and in her working life at an Anglo university, this restraint proved invaluable, indeed essential. I had to learn to 'calm down', to become less 'sharp' and less 'blunt', less 'excitable', less 'extreme' in my judgements, more 'tactful' in their expression. I had to learn the use of Anglo understatement (instead of more hyperbolic and more emphatic Polish ways of speaking). I had to avoid sounding 'dogmatic', 'argumentative', 'emotional'. (There were lapses, of course.) ... I had to learn

the use of English expressions such as 'on the one hand. . ., on the other hand', 'well yes', 'well no', or 'that's true, but on the other hand'. Thus, I was learning new ways of speaking, new patterns of communication, new modes of social interaction. I was learning the Anglo rules of turn-taking ('let me finish!', 'I haven't finished yet!'). I was learning not to use the imperative ('Do X!') in my daily interaction with people and to replace it with a broad range of interrogative devices ('Would you do X?' 'Could you do X?' 'Would you mind doing X?' 'How about doing X?' 'Why don't you do X?' 'Why not do X?', and so on).

Tannen (1984) describes levels of differences on which cross-cultural communication can falter: when to talk; what to say; pacing and pausing; listenership; intonation and prosody; formulaicity; indirectness; and cohesion and coherence. She describes the ways that meaning is communicated in talk. According to her (*ibid.*, p.194), communication is, by its very nature, culturally relative. Ways of communicating meaning in talk are learned in the speech community; that is, by talking to people with whom one identifies socially. As social networks are always local, not global, people in different communities have different ways of using linguistic means to communicative ends, and their ways of talking, like other cultural patterns, define them as a community.

### **Knowledge of Language as Discourse**

Bloor and Bloor (2007) examine different senses of the term 'discourse', all of which are relevant to pragmatic analysis. But two of these are of particular interest to us here. The primary one (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 7) explains discourse as a subject matter of pragmatic analysis:

... the whole act of communication involving production and comprehension, not necessarily verbal ... The study of discourse then, can involve matters like context, background information of knowledge shared between a speaker and hearer. And the secondary one (*ibid.*), which conceives discourse as a data base for pragmatic studies, says thus:

Discourse is frequently used to refer to the general communication that takes place in specific institutional contexts. For example, we can talk about the discourse of science, legal discourse, and so on.

Discourse thus covers the different ways by which language is used in pragmatics to represent, communicate or interact with the world in various mediums (of speech, writing, typing, computing, programming, etc.). Discourse provides the data for pragmatics study in all its ramifications. The content of discourse in pragmatics is varied and can be investigated in relation to cognition and context. Odebunmi (2018)

highlights some current issues in pragmatics concerning the study of discourse lexicogrammar, deixis, systems, genres, etc. The study of structures can focus any level of language or locution – phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexis and semantics – using appropriate theoretical frameworks. The structure of determiners or deixis, for example, can be examined in political or medical discourse with respect to their functions. The concern with systems can include transitivity, mood and modality, person, tense and theme. Propositions provide data bases for cognitive philosophical explanations in pragmatics on the subjects of truth condition, propositional and predicate calculus. The study of speech acts can examine types and functions of locution; pragmatic acts reveal the structural patterns in the activity and textual types of context in discourse; booster markers can be examined in appraisal theory; and politeness or impoliteness markers can be studied in any type of discourse.

Other aspects of discourse pragmatics may include an investigation of aspects of language skills in education or interactive learning, with a focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing processes severally or connectively. Focus may be on any or some of the constituents of textuality – cohesion, coherence, intertextuality, informativity, intention, situationality and acceptability (De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981). Further of relevance to pragmatic analysis is the discourse register or genre. The register refers to linguistic forms that define language usage in contexts based on theme/subject matter, style/tenor and mode/style (Halliday 1978). The subject matter is of various disciplines, such as medicine, law, science (mathematics, chemistry physics, biology, agricultural science, etc.), education, religion, politics and literature. And the discourse genres pertain to conventional structures associated with kinds of discourse, such as story, letter, drama, poetry, recipe, sermon, conversation and the research report (Halliday and Hasan 1985, Ewata, Oyebade and Onwu 2018). Odebunmi (2018), for example, gives an example of the generic structure potential of selected articles from selected pragmatic journals.

### **Knowledge of Context**

The centrality of 'context' in pragmatics is apparent right from the conception of 'pragmatics' as 'meaning in context'; that is, the conditions “under which utterances may be said to be felicitous” (Archer and Grundy 2011:2). This definition also captures the spirit of van Dijk's (1977) definition as whatever “we need to know about to properly understand the event, action or discourse” and Odebunmi's (2016:13) definition as “the condition that constraints the determination of the propositions of an utterance or the understanding of an event or discourse”.

Context is an abstract category used by language scholars to provide links between linguistic items and the social and situational contexts of communication. In general, the verbal, cultural and situational types of context have been recognised in language study.

The verbal context or 'co-text' falls within the purview of linguistics. It refers to the company which a linguistic item keeps in an utterance. In other words, interpreting expressions in a verbal context contrasts with the procedure of considering verbal items in isolation, while it emphasises interpretation of such items in terms of their linkage and relationship with one another. A consideration of verbal context interpretation inevitably reduces the instances of syntactic or lexical ambiguity that may be found if items are considered separately. A good example of a co-textual study is the study of cohesion in texts (Halliday and Hasan 1976); that is, a study of how the items in a text (words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, etc.) are connected to one another.

The cultural context or 'context of culture', according to Firth (1962) specifies the conventional or socio-cultural rules of behaviour which participants must share before they can communicate successfully with each other. Some of these conventional rules may be universal in application, while some are culture-specific. Sometimes, different societies may also have different orientations towards certain universally-formulated conventional rules. Conventional rules guide the use of linguistic utterances, paralinguistic devices (e.g. gestures and nodding) and non-lexical vocal devices (e.g. laughter, clicks and hisses) in different societies. Some societies have more elaborate greeting systems than others. Also a nod may mean 'yes' in a society, while it means 'no' in another. Knowledge of conventional rules brings up the idea of 'common-sense knowledge' (Garfinkel 1967), 'communicative competence' (Hymes 1972), 'shared knowledge' and 'mutual contextual beliefs' (Bach and Harnish 1979, Adebija 1999). These ideas enlighten us about how participants establish and maintain socialisation in communicative interaction. Communicative competence implies the ability of participants in an interaction to relate linguistic forms with the social norms and situational features in order to interpret utterances correctly. For example, a Yoruba child of five years should recognise the threat in the following ironical utterance (translated freely) instead of interpreting it literally (Adebite 1999):

Ex. 9. Father (to children): As soon as I go out, you can start your wild play, scatter everything in the house; then, when I come back, I shall commend you.

Another example can be asked in form of a quiz as follows:

Ex. 10. A friend looks rather ugly to you after having just applied a heavy make-up. She walks to you confidently, smiling, and asks you, "How do I look?"

What answer could you give her? Etiquette provides that a positive remark is required here to save the speaker's face, even if the listener will later suggest corrections of one or two faults in the make-up.

The situational context has been described by many scholars from various perspectives: anthropological, philosophical, linguistic, ethnographic, discourse analytic and pragmatic. But while some of them mention components of situation, some integrate both situational and social/conventional categories as components. For Malinowsky (1923), from an anthropological perspective, explains that the context of situation specifies the specific circumstances in which communication takes place, pertaining to time place, events and other conditions. Kaplan (1989), also from a philosophical angle, describes context as a quadruple of an agent (speaker of an utterance), location, time and world (possible world in which an utterance occurs). Among linguists, suggestions of components of context have also been made. For example, Firth (1962) lists the components of situation as: the participants together with their verbal and non-verbal actions; the relevant objects, the non-verbal and non-personal events; and the effect of verbal action. Ellis (1966) and Berry (1977) mention three components of situation as follows: thesis, immediate situation and wider situation. The components stand for the subject matter, physical context and background knowledge respectively. Halliday (1978) also identifies three components as field/subject matter, tenor/style and mode/medium. Hymes (1962) describes the components of situation from an ethnolinguistic point of view in eight components, neatly summarized by the acronym SPEAKING. Although Hymes' components have been utilised many times in pragmatic description, it should be recognised that they are meant to operate in speech events. Bloor and Bloor (2007) mentions the following components for discourse analysis:

- ∞the setting (or place/s) of the event;
- ∞time or times and aspect of the event;
- ∞mode and medium of the event (face to face; one speaker to many listeners; written to be read; television; illustrated text, for example);
- ∞participants and their roles in the event;
- ∞topic/s, themes (including distance of participants from the topics);
- ∞purpose of the discourse event and purposes of the participants;
- ∞attitude of the participants;
- ∞the dynamics of the situation (How do events, participants, topics, attitudes, and so on change during the course of the discourse event?)
- ∞the genre (where applicable)

From a pragmatic perspective, we identify two formulations that have been used extensively in recent times. The major components of Verschueren's (1999:vi) components are presented thus:

#### The Communicative Context

Language users: utterer and interpreter

The mental world (personality, emotions, beliefs, desires or wishes, motivations or intentions) The social world (Person deixis, attitudinal deixis, social settings or institutions;

Culture (norms and values based on cultural dimensions such as oral v. literate, rural v. urban, mainstream v. subcultural, social class, ethnicity, race, nationality, linguistic group, religion, age, level of education, profession, kinship, gender, sexual preference, etc.)

The physical world (Temporal reference, spatial reference)  
Linguistic Channel and Linguistic Context

Linguistic channels, (speech sounds, non-verbal spoken v. written)

Linguistic context (cohesion, intertextuality, sequencing)

The Generation of Context

Lines of vision (positioning imposes restrictions on what can be activated)

The manipulation of context

Contextualisation (Linguistic signals for the situated understanding of socio-cultural aspects of meaning)

Mey (2001) builds the components of context into his theory of pragmatic acts. In the theory, a pragmeme has two parts: activity and textual. The activity part covers speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational (dialogue) acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts and physical acts. The textual part involves context elements: INF (Inference), REF (Reference), REL (Relevance), VCE (Voice), SSK (shared situation knowledge), MPH (Metaphor), and M (Metapragmatic joker).

We shall end the discussion of context in this paper with a current and insightful classification of context description into four perspectives by Odebunmi (2016). The first perspective of 'context as influence from outside in' takes situation as the overriding factor in determining utterance meaning (cf. Mey 2001). In the main, it plays down conversation-intrinsic features and foregrounds conversation-extrinsic features which rely heavily on model users' common ground. The second perspective of 'context as influence from inside out' recognises the movement from language to situation (cf. Kecskes (2010). According to Kecskes (2010) the wording of linguistic expressions is as important in shaping meaning as the situation in which they are used and supplemented by extra-linguistic factors. The third perspective of 'context as influence from within itself' is considered as a strictly conversation-intrinsic condition, where context resides within the sequential confines of a conversation and does not necessarily require influences outside of the conversation (cf. Schegloff 1997). Citing Fetzer (2004: 34-45), Odebunmi (2016) writes that this perspective describes context as a dynamic construct traced to ethnomethodology, interactional sociolinguistics and socio-pragmatics where context is assigned the dual status of process and product. The fourth perspective of 'context as orientation to both A-priori and emergent interactive cues represents Kecskes (2010, 2014) intervention in the resolution of the knotty issues



of context in pragmatics by bringing into a union the context as influence from outside in and the context as influence from within itself variables.

### **Pragmatic Analysis and the Roles of Knowledge, Discourse and Context The Concept of Pragmatics**

Mey (2001) identifies the 'component' and 'perspective' viewpoints as the two dominant positions from which pragmatics has been described. The component position accounts for three conceptions in the literature. The first is the 'semanticism', 'pragmaticism' and 'complementarism' distinction, which respectively describes (i) the conception of semantics as a wider term that includes pragmatics, where pragmatics delimits interpretation to arrive at speaker's intended meaning and also remove ambiguity in utterances; (ii) pragmatics as a wider term that includes semantics and context or 'meaning in interaction'; and pragmatics as a term in complementary relationship with semantics (Stalnaker 1970, Leech 1983, Kempson 1977 and 1996, Thomas 1995, Adebija 1999, Wilson 2006, Embugushiki 2010). The second is the conception of pragmatics within a general theory of sign systems, known as semiotics, in which pragmatics relates signs to users of a language (Morris 1938, 1946). The third conception is that of pragmatics as speaker meaning expressed at two levels of reference and sense, on the one hand, and force, on the other hand (Thomas 1983, Yule 1996).

From the perspective viewpoint, Verschueren (1999) describes pragmatics as a general cognitive, social and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage as forms of behaviour. He claims that pragmatics is a perspective and not a component or just another interdisciplinary level of linguistic studies. For example, it is not a component like phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. So, also, it is not an interdisciplinary level like stylistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, each of which has its own extra-linguistic correlational object(s). Pragmatics, as 'the linguistics of language use', has neither its own units of analysis nor its own correlational objects; it is all encompassing and accommodates relevant contributions from any field of knowledge or experience that can throw light on the interpretation of utterances at any unit(s) or level(s) of description. The questions to ask are (i) 'How do users mean what we say in utterances?' In other words, what principles, strategies and conditions enable speakers to mean more than what they say or interpret more than what they hear? (ii) 'How do users say what they mean?' What linguistic devices exist at their disposal to communicate in different contexts.

### **Approaches to Pragmatic Analysis**

Mey (2001) makes a distinction between 'pragmatics' and 'meta-pragmatics' in pragmatics analysis. While pragmatics is the study of humans communicatively using language in the context of society, meta-pragmatics is where we discuss the way we define and do pragmatics, and where we debate issues such as why one definition of pragmatics is better than another, what kind of relationship pragmatics has to

semantics, how many principles we want to work with in pragmatics, whether or not we should include an activity such as conversational analysis in pragmatic studies, and so on. Furthermore, we can choose to focus on definitional questions or we can concentrate on the conditions that govern the communicative use of language in society (and, indirectly, our ways of doing pragmatics). When we describe the various speech acts or structures such as demonstratives, reference, discourse/pragmatic markers, information structure, some unique vocabulary, expression or structure) that human beings use in communication, we are engaging in pragmatics. But if we ask ourselves what principles govern the use of speech acts and how they relate to other human communicative activities, we are touching upon meta-pragmatic questions. The same applies also, if we ask for an explanation why, for instance, the speech act of promising among a group of people seems to have a different pragmatic value than it has in Western societies. Mey (2001:176) mentions three ways of dealing with meta-pragmatics: (i) as a theoretical discussion on what pragmatics is, and what it should comprise; (ii) as a discussion of the conditions and possibilities that enable people to act by using words, to do pragmatics by acting pragmatically; and (iii) as the pragmatic pendant to the metalinguistic level, which is often captured under the label of 'reflexive language' (our awareness of linguistic choices made in communication and our ability of reflecting on them)

The pragmatics and meta-pragmatics distinction above is similar in conception to that between 'formal' and 'social' pragmatics by Amfo (2018). Formal pragmatics is the theorising and conceptual proposals in the field with respect to Austin and Searle's speech act theory, Grice and conversational implicatures, Sperber and Wilson and Relevance theory, politeness, impoliteness and face theories by Leech, Brown and Levinson, Culpeper, Locher and Watts and intercultural and cross-cultural pragmatics by Kecskes, Tannen, Thomas, Spencer-Oatey and Wierzbicka. In contrast, social pragmatics involves the analysis of language use in social institutional and situational contexts such education, religion, gender, health, politics and medicine (cf. Fakoya 2006, Amfo 2018 and Ugwu 2018).

The themes of the International Pragmatics Association Conference in Hong Kong, 2019 ([https://pragmatics.international>page](https://pragmatics.international/page)) offer new insights on relevant content for pragmatics scholars in Africa in future research:

**Post-coloniality:** Otherness (in terms of identity and difference), resistance (freedom, liberty, identity or individuality) as subversion, opposition or mimicry), uniting local conceptions with western conceptions, centralised economic and cultural system that is either western import or hybridised.

Hitherto, the concept has been addressed mainly from literary and historical perspectives, and, especially, through reports in the news media.

**Marginalisation:** The concept connects with all the concepts mentioned under post- coloniality above. It is broad-based and has been covered in many disciplines of the humanities. It has also been well addressed in sociolinguistics (under topics of bilingualism and multilingualism), critical linguistics or discourse analysis and literature (especially sexist or feminist discourse). Interrogation of the concept has brought up oppositions in social classification such as majority v. minority, superior v. subordinate/subaltern, presence v. absence/silence, dominance v. oppression and centre/core v. periphery.

Major demographic factors are used as variables for demonstration of the concept, including gender, age, ethnicity, education, race, social class, occupation and linguistic hegemony.

**Democratisation:** This broadly refers to the processes involved in the transition to a more democratic political regime or the substantive political changes observed in moving in a democratic direction. The factors that affect or limit democratisation are many, including wealth, social capital, education, protests, natural resources and foreign trade or intervention; and the benefits derivable are equality, inclusive participation, justice and respect for human rights.

This concept has been mainly described in political science, political philosophy and reports of social activism.

Verschueren (1999) discusses issues pertaining to micro- and macro-pragmatics. There, the author respectively presents some examples of “verbal behaviour at the micro-level of small-scale (or face to face) interaction”; and pragmatic investigations that transcend direct interpersonal interaction, which include problems of intercultural and international communication, discourse-based study of ideology and the pragmatics of wide societal debates. To illustrate micro-pragmatics, Verschueren (1999:203-226) presents (i) the case of particle ordering in Dutch to illustrate performativity, using an example of a conversation between a university professor and a student; and (ii) instances of how meaning can be generated in actual verbal behaviour in, first, an informal setting between daughter and father and, second, an institutional/professional context, a courtroom (cf. Adegbite 2005, Adegbite and Odebunmi 2006, Odebunmi 2011).

Under macro-pragmatics, Verschueren (1999) discusses (i) the phenomena of intercultural and international communication, focusing on the way in which the metapragmatic framing of the Other's linguistic behaviour betrays a lack of understanding of, or respect for, communicative diversity and Adegbija (1994) describes the context of language planning in Africa, using Nigeria as a case study.

Verschueren (1999) warns, however, that the micro-/macro- distinction is artificial because macro-processes transcending small scale interaction cannot be studied without investigating details at the micro-level and micro-processes are embedded in a wider social realm, however strictly confined to face-to-face context they may be. Thus, for the distinction to make sense, it should be interpreted as one of a scale from the micro-pole to the macro-pole.

Scholars have also distinguished between two complementary parts of pragmatics: pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics. According to Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983), both components refer to the resources for conveying communicative and interpersonal meanings within the frame of social perceptions, which work as the base of participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action. But while the former represents an interface between linguistics and pragmatics, the latter represents an interface between pragmatics and sociology. Pragma-linguistics (cf. Mey 1979) deals with what speakers intend with their utterances, how hearers react to what they hear and what they take the words to mean. It refers to a description of the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings. Such resources include pragmatic strategies, routines, and other range of linguistic forms which can soften or intensify communicative acts. Pragma-linguistic competence requires the tact (tactics) of users (speaker and listener, writer and reader) to utilise appropriate linguistic forms (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis and semantics) to match the pragmatic forces of utterances. Lack of this tact denotes an aspect of pragmatic incompetence, which may lead to pragma-linguistic failure in communication.

In contrast, socio-pragmatics refers to the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative actions. Socio-pragmatics is about proper social behaviour. It involves speakers' and hearers' beliefs built on relevant social and cultural values (Leech 1983:10). Socio-pragmatics describes users' knowledge and orientation towards social regulations about habits, beliefs, ideologies and values, politeness, deference and taboos. Thus, socio-pragmatic competence is the ability to adjust speech strategies appropriately according to different social variables such as degree of imposition, social dominance and distance between participants of conversation and participants' rights and obligations in communication. Both pragmatological and socio-pragmatic incompetence are sources of pragmatic failure in communication (Adegbite 2006, Tsao 2017).

### **Theoretical Considerations in Pragmatic Analysis**

Pragmatics scholars in Nigeria are thus encouraged to provide original alternative theories to conceptualisations from the West. Data for research should derive from indigenous contexts in the local languages and second language usage of English. Theories for analysing the data may utilise fresh concepts from linguistics and social theory without necessary recourse to pre-existing euro-centric concepts. Future research focus in Nigeria may examine geopolitical margins and how epistemological

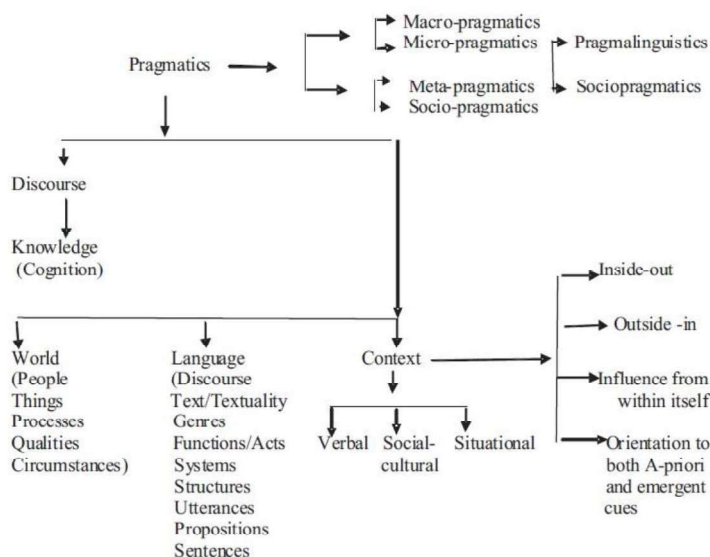
hegemonies within societies show stubborn resistance to decentring, with gendered, linguistic, political, religious, sexual, socio-cultural and socio-economic margins also requiring closer attention. And current analysis of pragmatics discourse from the following areas should continue as they provide relevant context and data base for future pragmatic research: workplace, diversity, globalisation, multilingualism, digital technology, identity, social change, peace and conflict, politics, metaphor, embodiment and multimodality.

Data for research should derive from indigenous contexts in the local languages and second language usage of English. Scholars should avoid wholesale application of theories of native speakers' English to describe second language users' English. For example, many theories of pragmatics such as Grice's 'conversational maxims', Austin and Searle's speech act theory, relevance theory, the various theories of politeness and impoliteness and pragmatic acts theory cannot apply wholesale to local contexts of communication in Nigeria. But facets of these theories exist in indigenous cultures of Nigeria for linguistic investigation. For example, concepts such as *omolúwàbí* (well behaved), *iwàpèlé* (gentleness) and *ibòwòfún, ìteriba* (respect) in Yoruba, where deep research into the characterisation may yield alternatives to current theories on politeness and impoliteness (Odebunmi 2015, Lawal 2018). Applied linguistic research benefits a lot from cognate disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and anthropology, African languages and literatures, history and archaeology and religion. Pragmatics scholars should scrutinise relevant research available or collaborate with scholars in these fields to stimulate originality in research.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of pragmatics to linguistic studies is that it enables scholars and students to understand the processes, principles and procedures guiding the interpretation of socio-cultural and contextual meanings of utterances. Pragmatic methods are needed if we want a fuller, deeper and generally more reasonable account of human language behaviour: outside pragmatics, there can be no understanding of utterances. In this paper, we have described the relations among knowledge, discourse and context as central constituents of pragmatics studies (see Fig 1 above) and have presented some essential theoretical concepts, principles and procedures under them for an understanding of pragmatics using examples from the English language. Scholars at this conference-cum-workshop are expected to discuss further on the content of the paper and examine the relevance of pragmatic analysis of human language resources and their utilisation and application for a proper understanding of human cognition, discourse contexts and social development.

**Fig. 1: Constituents of Pragmatics Studies**



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## **CURRENT METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN PRAGMATICS RESEARCH**

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### **Abstract**

Though pragmatics tends to have stirred the interest of many Nigerian and African language scholars, some of these researchers may not have operated with clear-cut methodological orientations. Thus, the optimism of pragmatics ameliorating communicative challenges of the society could be compromised. This is the motivation for this intervention. This paper explores the scope of pragmatics research; identifies philosophical and methodological possibilities; diagnoses some methodological challenges and proffers some solutions. The submissions resonate with the stipulations of the *International Pragmatics Association*.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, methodology, research, discourse, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

In line with global trends, significant proportions of research in language departments of Nigerian institutions in recent times have tended to tilt towards pragmatics and related fields. These are domains that emphasize functional dynamics of language as opposed to formal stipulations. The new thinking, as exemplified by Newmeyer (2010), is that structures exist to reinforce function. In many cases when language functions are compromised, the society is imperiled. This point has been poignantly underscored by Kraus & Morsella (2000) in their argument that almost every conflict has implicated deficits in communication.

Communication deficits, as meant here, are related to breaches in cooperative maxims. Bach (2004) argues that these maxims, which may be extra-linguistic, are actually pragmatically inferred. This reality tends to suggest that the future looks up to pragmatics for deeper interpretations and for sustainability. This hope must be anchored on a brand of pragmatics that has well-defined methodological orientations. This expectation is even more fundamental for the African context with myriads of almost intractable conflicts. Therefore, rather than recline on the comfort of theoretical pragmatics, we are challenged to launch deep into the wider scope of pragmatics, seeking significance in solving our problems. This optimism propels this discussion as I invite all to a conversation on some of the current methodological issues in pragmatics research.

### **Scope of Pragmatics Research**

Though Morris (1938) coined the term *pragmatics* from the philosophical base, our focus is on developments in the 1970's when pragmatics became a subfield of linguistics. It is within the linguistic receptacle that we nurse the hope that pragmatics would offer a more holistic account of human linguistic behaviour. It is in this receptacle that we experience the moderating influence of context on meaning. It is within this new paradigm that we examine factors that govern language choices in social interactions, together with an investigation of how our choices affect others. An underlying assumption is that pragmatics, just like any other relevant approach to the study of language would reveal in a more satisfying way, the meaning potential of every linguistic unit.

In the light of this meaning nexus, it is easy to trace a close connection between pragmatics and discourse. For our purpose, I share the description of discourse canvassed by Woods (2006) and elaborated upon by Abioye (2018). This is the view that, discourse, as the hub of language use, emphasizes the “real language that real people use in the real world”(p. 8). The manifestation of language is far beyond the atomistic nature of words or even the intermediate structures of phrases and clauses. The critical essence is meaning in its full ramifications, including the remit of semiotics. This meaning incorporates action as hinted by Norris & Jones (2005).

In extending the meaning imperative of discourse, Rocci (2009), identifies both the semantic and the pragmatic domains. The semantic dimension expresses the meaning which captures the states of affairs in the real world, while the pragmatic level reveals the action potential of texts. The meaning in focus is context-reinforced. It will suffice at this stage to point out that on a balance, and following Rocci (*ibid*), while semantics focuses on the propositional acts of a piece of discourse, pragmatics provides a deeper interactive perception of language in use. This deeper dimension of pragmatics is in the revelation of the range of relationships involved.

With this clarification in mind we can assume discourse analysis as an attempt to offer a systematic explication of any discourse. This analysis becomes critical when it offers a radical critique of relations. Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the tradition of Fairclough (1989), is imbued with the responsibility of foregrounding the ideological underpinnings of a text. This responsibility connects CDA to many interrelated disciplines in order to satisfy its eight-point agenda. The agenda as elaborated upon by Fairclough & Wodak (1997), is the appraisal of social problems, the establishment of power relations, the connecting of the society and its culture and the highlighting of the ideology behind the text. Others are the tracing of the history of the discourse, the interpreting of texts from the societal perspective, the underscoring of a methodology and the maintaining of a scientific perspective.



What appears to emerge from our discussion is that the substance of analysis is discourse; and this ultimately connects to language as the core. Both Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics are approaches to eliciting meaning. Indeed, Moeschler (1998) had argued earlier that discourse does not exist as a linguistic unit, but rather a pragmatic one. This submission has yielded a creative approach referred to as discoursepragmatics.

In advocating for an activity-based approach to pragmatics, Allwood (2000) outlines the multidisciplinary source of the subject, including anthropology (as in Malinowski, 1923); linguistics (as in Firth, 1957); philosophy (as in Wittgenstein, 1953; Austin, 1962; Grice, 1967); psychology (as in Bühler, 1934; Rommetveit, 1974); and Sociology (as in Mead, 1934; Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1974; Sacks, Schelloff & Jefferson 1974). In the light of new knowledge vistas, these sources have been expanded.

Odebunmi (2016) for instance, identifies allies of discourse as anthropology, artificial intelligence, computer science, linguistics, literature, media studies, psychiatry, psychology and sociology. Other relevant areas include advertising, film, language teaching, law, lexicography and many other developing fields. Indeed, following Chilwa (2017) there is a wide range of the application areas of discourse which help in the explication of deception in language.

According to Grundy (2008), pragmatics is the study of language in a contextualized reality. Pragmatics also studies the principles associated with this contextualized communication. A study in pragmatics transcends all levels of linguistic organization- from sounds, words, sentences, and even extended texts in diverse fields.

Interestingly, all the application areas of pragmatics identified by Odebunmi (ibid) are linked to the influence of context and situation on meaning in language use. While semantics inheres in word or sentence meaning from logical and truth-based considerations, pragmatics is concerned with utterance meaning, especially from the speaker's point of view. Pragmatics offers more meaning than what is said or written. This meaning differential is accounted for in Austin's (1962) dichotomy of communicative sense and communicative force.

Sense relates to the propositional content or logical interpretation, while force is the act performed in uttering a linguistic structure. Thus, force connotes the illocutionary content. It is at the level of force that we invoke felicity conditions, which validate utterances that must perform acts. Pragmatics is further enhanced by Grice's (1967) cooperative maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. A violation of any of these maxims is often linked to implicature. Indeed, implicature is an inferred meaning different from the initial logical meaning of the utterance.

Incidentally, violations of these maxims are common in intercultural communication as observed by Riley (1989:234). According to Grundy (ibid, 299), the effect of implicature even for intercultural communication would be minimized if the uniformity of context would be assured. But this would always remain a very ambitious expectation in language as a dynamic social heritage. Put differently, Grice's maxims according to Allwood (ibid) assume that communication must be between rational people (sharing specific contexts).

The social action imperative of discourse as exemplified by Wittgenstein (1953) and elaborated upon by Austin's speech acts theory (1962), argues that meaning is determined by use. Allwood (ibid) has built the activity-based communication on the initial ideas of Wittgenstein (ibid) with the proviso that the context of use could be perceptual, social activity laden or based on background information, with newer manifestations.

The speech acts theory has been criticized for its insensitivity to context even at crosscultural boundaries. There is also the suspicion that illocutionary and perlocutionary acts could be collapsed into intention. In addition, there is a problem with acts that elicit multiple illocutionary forces. Based on these criticisms, Allwood tends to align with the relevance theories as canvassed by Schutz (1970) (See also Wilson & Sperber, 2002).

The sustaining force in human communication is relevance. It is relevance that ensures that those in communication organize their cognitive structures. Interestingly, relevance has a critical intersection with Grice's relational maxim. Advocates of the relevance theories emphasize obligations in communication in such key areas as sincerity, grounding and consideration. Sincerity refers to the demand that we communicate only what is true; grounding that only competent and authoritative sources should give information; while the consideration criterion ensures that we respect the personality of others in communication.

These communication obligations notwithstanding, there have been fundamental observations which could serve as caveats. Allwood observes that relevance is in degrees and never absolute; there is also the plausibility of multiple relevance. There is therefore the need for a more rigorous theoretical foundation to gauge relevance in communication. There is definitely a place for context in all issues of meaning.

The overarching position of context in pragmatics is shared by pragmatists of different persuasions. According to Nazar (2014), context mediates across the speaker, the utterance, the act performed and the hearer. This probably informs Grundy's earlier position that context is the totality of all relevant elements of the social structure or the epistemological foundations of an utterance.

Context could be distal/ macro or micro with regard to the communicative enterprise. It is distal when it accommodates a wider frame of reference; context is at the micro level when the focus is on a stretch of utterance. From these two perspectives, and in line with Yan (2005), context could be physical, epistemic, linguistic or social.

Physical context expresses the physical location, time and exact situation of the utterance. Epistemic context relates to what the speaker and the hearer know about the universe (i.e. the world) as well as the shared background knowledge. Linguistic context shows what has been uttered before or after the new communication. The linguistic context draws from a hierarchical arrangement of information. The social context reveals the relationship between speakers and hearers, such as father and son, student and teacher, doctor and patient, e.tc.

### **A Scientific View of Pragmatics**

Since the age of Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and which ushered in the revolution in natural philosophy, the idea of what is scientific has been snowballing. It is in this context that a wide range of subjects including linguistics would qualify as social science. Indeed, the social sciences as perceived by Mollet (2011), and Young (2016) among others, are perceived to address different issues of the society and more importantly, issues of human relationships. This web of relationship has created compounds of disciplines with linguistics such that we have anthropological linguistics, computational linguistics, geographical linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics etc.

This wide interface between linguistics and the social sciences has profound implications for methodology. Indeed, positive social sciences (i.e. quantitative), in line with Shapiro (2017), appropriate natural science methods in explicating social phenomena. Interpretivist (i.e. qualitative) social scientists, on the other hand, engage in social critique and a wider web of symbolic exegesis. Within the social science umbrella, linguistics is pushed to focus not only on the cognitive, but also on the social domains of language. Herein lays the functional imperative which makes pragmatics both a tool and substance of analysis.

Quantitative approaches emphasize statistical analyses based on tangible evidence drawn from a large spectrum of cases across intentionally designed field samples. It is from these samples that we generate and validate general claims. Qualitative models engage in direct observations, actual communication with participants, or textual analysis. Though the aim could be to understand social phenomena, especially from the perspective of language use, there could be some degree of contextual and subjective accuracy.

### **Approaches to Pragmatics Research**

As a discipline that draws from conventional linguistic traditions and social science paradigms, certain trends have been identified. These trends are theoretical, contrastive, corpus-based, empirical and experimental approaches.

A frontline contribution to the theoretical approach to pragmatics has been offered by Benz, Jasinskaja & Sauerland (2012). The theoretical approach represents the initial strategy for the study of pragmatics. The linguist would rely on his or her intuition to make generalizations about highly hypothetical utterances. Quite often theoretical studies would incorporate real data, especially in the writing of school texts. This approach has featured prominently in the Nigerian context with the result that pragmatic research has yielded very little in solving real communication challenges in the country. Indeed, many of our experts in the field provide good support in forensic and language analysis to research clusters in continental Europe with international lead researchers.

There appears to be the consensus among the contributors to the publication, *Contrastive Pragmatics* edited by Aijmer (2011), that the subject matter is the comparison of pragmatic principles across languages and cultures. The intention is to reveal conventional functions and meanings in languages on a universal basis. This approach holds a strong promise to support contemporary inquiry into the nature of principles and parameters of universals in language.

The task of contrastive pragmatics naturally includes the discovery of language-specific parameters for communication. Experience has shown that much of what has been done in the broad area of contrastive analysis in the Nigerian context has remained within the domains of phonology and syntax. As we strive for international understanding in the spirit of globalization and the knowledge economy, contrastive pragmatics would open up new research opportunities.

According to Aijmer & Ruehleman (2014), corpus pragmatics is a burgeoning field that draws from the intersection between pragmatics and the more established field of corpus linguistics. There is the implication of the incorporation of serious computational skills in dealing with pragmatic issues in language.

Relevant electronic texts are collected, ordered and analyzed to discover usage patterns from which to make generalizations about pragmatic realities. This approach has a strong promise with big data analytics. The approach, when fully developed, could help in solving some of the security problems of the nation, especially when reinforced with forensic strategies.

Dijk (1981) provides some background to the nature of empirical pragmatics. Further work in the field reveals that it combines theoretical and corpus-based strategies to elicit consistent data. See Bochner, Brahanter, Kissine & Ross (2011). The quality of the new data would then be used to interrogate or support existing pragmatic theories. In adopting experimental paradigms, empirical pragmatics prospects into new models to interpret linguistic phenomena. The strength of this approach is in its robust data collection method which appears to be eclectic.

According to Schwarz (2017), experimental pragmatics is a relatively new development in the field. The data elicited from a variety of ways, including interviews, spontaneous speech, experiments is used to evaluate conventions in real life situations.

It will be profitable to bear in mind that pragmatics is about doing things with language within specific contexts. In this connection, therefore, no single approach or theory is adequate to capture the full range of what we can do with language, especially across the multifaceted disciplines. To a large extent, pragmatics incorporates principles of content analysis.

As a robust method of data treatment in communication studies, Igweonwu (2004), drawing from the insights of Berelson (1952), presents content analysis as a reliable and objective, systematic characterization of the content of any communication. In striving to achieve objectivity, content analysis, defines in precise terms, the critical categories of analysis, including language units and context markers. There is great emphasis on the analysis of words, statements, utterances, paragraphs and entire texts.

Whatever categories selected must be relevant to the objective and content of research. Relevance is measured by the functional value of each category. The full range of categories should be manageable in time and scope. The functionality of categories is measured by the extent to which they address the stated research questions or hypotheses. The criterion of being systematic underscores the scientific basis such that results will be independent of researcher biases. As a social science procedure, content analysis validates its results with qualitative support.

In the age of computer applications, content analysis is becoming increasingly adaptable to computational procedures. From the more accommodating receptacle of the social sciences, pragmatics research tends to appropriate multidisciplinary models. The understanding is that no single theory would satisfy all relevant conditions. Therefore, the eclectic methodology is highly advocated. This position, indeed, is a reflection of the philosophical trajectory.

### **Philosophical Orientations in Pragmatics Research**

Research methodology is the systematic analysis and application of theoretical underpinnings of the procedures of investigation in specific fields of learning, including linguistics, and more precisely, pragmatics. There is a highly philosophical basis which highlights the principles associated with the branch of knowledge. The intention is to create something new. In agreement with Fawole (2013), apart from creating the window for new discoveries and innovations, research builds the platform for error correction in human thought processes. It is this propensity for error correction that creates the atmosphere to solve problems in the society. The propensity also points the way to further developments.

The emphasis of creative research is on such concepts as paradigms, models as well as quantitative and qualitative techniques. There is also a drive towards the justification for preferred methods in line with the idea of best practices. The reference to creativity is to avoid the persistent error of verbatim copy of foreign research approaches that may not address salient issues of our land. This challenge has been underscored by Npom (2013) in very strong terms. According to him, without a change of attitude in research practices, scholars in developing nations would continue to be irrelevant.

Philosophy derives from a Greek term which translates as *the love of wisdom*. It concentrates on the study of fundamental and general issues of life such as reality, knowledge, values, reason, the mind and language. Language is critical for philosophical analysis because of the issue of nuances.

Generally, philosophy is systematic and relies on rational argument. In the environment of research, the focus is more on epistemology, which explores the nature and scope of Knowledge. There is also a focus on the relationship between knowledge on one hand, and the truth, belief, perception, theories, justification, etc. on another. The drive for knowledge creates and innovates. It would seem as if philosophical explanations would favour truth-based semantics. The reality shows that many of the postulations in pragmatics have their roots in philosophy. There is the important role of perception which yields pragmatic possibilities.

Philosophy provides the blueprint for research, guiding the entire research enterprise with concepts and assumptions which support practice and beliefs. This guide is intended to be logical and conceptual, not necessarily physical. The guide also explains the empirical, theoretical, cumulative and verifiable processes involved. The philosophical basis of research is connected to Aristotle's *Stasis* theory which he developed with Hermagorasto test whether or not a research effort would qualify as an invention and lift people to higher levels. To serve these purposes, every research must answer the following questions as drawn from Purdue Online Writing Lab (2018,

<https://owl.englishpurdue.edu/resource>):

- (i) What are the facts (conjectures)?
- (ii) What is the meaning or nature of the issue in terms of the definition?
- (iii) What is the level of seriousness of the issue, (i.e. the quality?)
- (iv) What is the plan of action-policy?

Pragmatics research is also expected to be ethical. Ethics describes a system of public and general rules governing human conduct-applying to **every** research and open to all. In relation to research and as elaborated upon by Fawole (ibid), ethics is based on the moral principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy and justice. The principle of non- maleficence ensures that the research is not intended to cause harm to others. That is why quality and relevance are key considerations in pragmatics.

A flip side of non- maleficence is beneficence, which expects the researcher to be concerned with the welfare of others. The autonomy demand of research relates to the freedom of the researcher to determine the direction and focus of research. Since most of social science research and especially pragmatics deals with human relations, there is the need to ensure that all groups and segments that are equal are treated with the same reference point.

Research involving experiments, tests, evaluation, data collection, data sharing, peer review and analysis are expected to incorporate these ethical principles. Other allies of the ethical considerations include scientific honesty with a commitment to seek the truth without fabrication, *forgery* and misrepresentation.

As much as it is practicable, every research effort is expected to be carefully executed so as to minimize on errors. This condition is critical for interpretive studies, especially, in an era of fake news and deception. Research in knowledge creating centres such as universities, should be carried out in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. Researchers would need the liberty to pursue new ideas and criticize old ones so as to create new knowledge. This pursuit would be within the corporate visionary provisions. There has to be the openness to share results, methods, theories and findings. This is a cardinal objective of workshops such as this. This condition of openness generates the responsibility required to maintain public trust. Indeed, research findings are to be placed in the public domain.

Researchers are expected to acknowledge sources of their information so as to avoid plagiarism. Every researcher should take responsibility for their submissions even as they climb on the shoulders of earlier giants to see much further. It is in this light that research holds the key to the advancement of human development. This responsibility is discharged by evaluating the present, solving identified problems, creating and

disseminating knowledge in specific areas of human endeavours. These expectations have formed the foundation for the motto of the famous Google Scholar platform, which is *standing on the shoulders of giants*.

### **Methodological Issues in Pragmatics Research**

In the course of the discussion, we have broached on some of the salient issues in pragmatics research in the Nigerian context. In the sections that follow, we shall discuss in some detail the major issues that relate to the methodology of research.

A fundamental issue in pragmatics research just as is the case with other social science investigations is the challenge of ethical consideration. In line with Mollet (2011), researchers in developing countries have a unique responsibility to uphold the highest ethical standards in their research enterprise. These are societies that are highly pluralistic with diverse cultural backgrounds. These are also societies that experience diverse security challenges such that even what appears benign would escalate tension. The Rwanda crisis of the 1990's for instance, occurred at the instance of language insensitivity.

Another broad issue of concern is the originality claim of research, because we are expected to chart new ways and open new vistas. Incidentally, even the universities, which ordinarily should serve as innovation hubs have gradually been attacked by the bug of the performance engine as explained by Govindarajan & Trimble (2013). A performance engine is primed for routine operations that serve the immediate needs. To be innovative is not just to think of what has never existed at all. If that happens, research will admirably move gravitas. Innovation comes in many forms to yield fresh insights. It might be fairly easy or obvious to recognize what is "original" in some fields or in some types of research. In some other fields of study, any claim of originality may sound elusive.

Originality could occur in exploring the unknown. This may be in the form of a major investigation in an area or a subject which has never been investigated. The researcher may decide to study new concepts, or new phenomena. There may also be originality in use of a new set of data and information. The more data the researcher collects, the higher the chance for a more original work. It is possible to find out, after careful post processing, or analysis of data, that some of the data collected might manifest an original behaviour, a side-product, or an unseen benefit.

Originality is easily manifested in the transfer of knowledge. This is usually linked to a wider application with visible societal significance. It is common to notice the outcome of the plain English research in legal documents. Pragmatic methods used in focus group discussions in sociolinguistic research have found great value in market



research and related fields. Indeed, a discovery may not be new to a discipline, but it may turn out to be important in another field. See Dirk (1999).

Related to the issue of originality is the question of the real value of pragmatics research. As a component of the expanded sociolinguistics spectrum, pragmatics situates prominently within applied linguistics. In that regard, pragmatics research would be far beyond basic research. It is therefore; in the domain of applied research that pragmatics would find greater relevance. This thinking has great implications for methodology.

By its nature pragmatics research favours the qualitative, descriptive design. There is a major challenge of how to interpret the results without bias. To achieve objectivity, the objectives should be stated clearly and the procedures faithfully followed. Research instruments, including interview guides, questionnaires, tests and other data elicitation templates should relate to the objectives. There must also be evidence of the validity and reliability of the research instruments. All statistical support should be relevant to the nature of research. It is not always that what sounds sophisticated is appropriate.

The ultimate gauge of the success of the methodology of pragmatics research is based on the checklist of what pragmatists do. From a survey of some of the leading authors in the field, pragmatists identify the kernel of messages beyond what is expressed on the surface. This is the whole essence of accommodation, abduction, inference, presupposition and entailment. Pragmatists concern themselves with the concept of appropriateness as opposed to grammaticality; they also extol relevance based on the context and multicultural sensibilities. This wide range of possibilities in pragmatics is wrapped up in this quote by Jürgen Habermas: “**The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible mutual understanding.**” (Habermas, 2000, p.21). Indeed, no truth however sacred, if not shared builds trust. This sharing transcends the content and permeates the context beyond the micro structure of the contiguous linguistic units.

## Conclusion

In the light of the great promise of pragmatics to chart the way for enhanced human communication even at the global level, we have explored the wider scope of the evolving field from a social science *cum* linguistic platform. We have also discussed some of the contemporary approaches to the pragmatics enterprise as a prelude to highlighting major issues of methodology in the field. It would be appropriate to link our exploration with the promise of the parent body; the International Pragmatics Association established 1986 and headquartered at the University of Antwerp in Belgium.

Membership is spread across more than 70 nations and the core objective is to study at the international level, issues of language use. The association favours the interdisciplinary study of cognitive, social and cultural domains of language and communication as a condition for the emergence of a general framework. The association is also interested in the stimulation of various fields of the application of the knowledge of language.

Another fundamental objective of the association is the dissemination of information related to the pragmatic aspects of language across a wider spectrum of users. It is on this note that the study of pragmatics is recommended for inclusion in the training modules of lawyers, mediators, advocates, negotiators, forensic practitioners, advertisers, translators, caregivers, politicians, journalists, marketers, public speakers and all persons that have any business relating with the public. Language teaching would be profitably enriched with cross-cultural pragmatics and social cultural norms, with specific reference to issues of mental sets, schemata, scripts, speech events, linguistic etiquette, socio-cultural norms and pragmatic accents. Mental sets reveal the frame of mind and disposition at work when we think of life realities, challenges and situations. The schemata component deals with the previous knowledge and memory structure individuals have about the world and issues around them. It is possible, for example that the idea of what constitutes wealth may differ from one society to another. Scripts relate to the existing knowledge structure necessary for interpreting events in daily living. There may be different sets of interconnected activities in hosting a party, resolving a conflict or engaging in market negotiations.

Speech events are the sets of situations and circumstances which involve the interaction of people in a conventional way and for which a specific range of outcomes is expected. While the idea of paying compliments, making a request, expressing disagreements and lodging complaints may be universal, there are peculiarities across cultures. Appropriate culturally relevant phatic communion, paralinguistics, use of silence, turn taking cues, formulaic opening/ closing protocol among others constitute sociocultural norms. The linguistic etiquette associated with cultural differences manifests in the power and authority structure as well as the social distance evident in communication event. Some forms of request may be construed as threats based on the perception of the interlocutors as conveyed by the etiquette. The pragmatic accent expresses what a communicator assumes to be relayed, but which is not said. These expanded domains have been advanced by Yule (1996), Riley (1989) and Pavlidou (2000). There should also be special modules on transcendental pragmatics for preachers and counsellors.

In spite of this expanded scope of what pragmatics offers the society, the growth of the discipline depends on a robust theoretical and methodological reference point. Since the focus is on language use, the most natural domain would be linguistics. The

focus would be to seek out universal constructs that bind human languages together. This point has been canvassed earlier when we closed the gap between formalistic and functional approaches to language study, in the tradition of Newmeyer (ibid). This is at the heart of linguistic theorizing in line with Chomsky's proposals for principles and parameters. Jurafsky (2004) has wittingly reflected on pragmatic cues in human communication. These cues are basically linguistic. They reflect the indexical relationships easily tagged in computational pragmatics. Cues in pragmatics, according to Bunt & Black (2000), and Curl & Bell (2001) are probabilistic surface features that are associated with speech or dialogue acts.

These cues could be lexical, syntactic or prosodic. A cue is lexical when the collocation or even the predicate calculus of a word would determine aspects of the interpretation of the utterance. Syntactic cues manifest easily in the types of sentences uttered in terms of declaratives, imperatives and interrogatives. Prosodic cues occur as rhythm, amplitude, rhyme, stress and intonation. The interaction of the input utterances and output dialogues can be predicted using a cue-based algorithm, even far beyond the traditional application of adjacency pairs. This indeed, is the direction of research in computational pragmatics.

If we draw further inspiration from the objective of the International Pragmatics Association, we would see a methodological coalescence between pragmatics and the ubiquitous expanse of language engineering. In this introspection, we connect with the idea that language engineering is committed to the development of language for wider application, in line with Ogbulogo (2013). This optimism relies on a solid methodological foundation with big data and skills in analytics. Thus, this conversation can suffice as a catalyst for further engagements.

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**NORTHERN HEGEMONIC METAPRAGMATICS OVER-FEEDING  
GLOBAL PRAGMATICS: WHITHER THE METAPRAGMATICS OF  
THE SOUTHERN PERIPHERY?**

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**Abstract**

This paper appraises the historical development of pragmatics as one of the youngest branches of linguistics, from its humble beginning in philology to its present enviable status. However, Northern hegemonic meta-pragmatics tends to be over-feeding global pragmatics to the detriment and disadvantage of the Southern periphery, which is clearly marginalised in terms of theoretical and empirical inputs. Locating these unequal epistemological relations within a conceptual model of globalisation as neo imperialism, “a pretender to universalism”, the paper urges pragmaticians of the Global South, especially Africa, to brace up for the epistemological gap and the challenges entailed in the development of African pragmatics, in our own peculiar situation. To do this, it is suggested we fall back on our Triple Heritage (Mazrui, 2001) comprising the three epistemological streams of “literature”, “orature” and “scripture,” which have furnished the universal pool of wisdom and civilisation (Lawal, 2004). Following what is hereby termed “meta-pragmatic imagination”, the paper then proceeds to illustrate how insights from “orature” and “scripture” can be deployed to enrich global pragmatics and meta-pragmatics.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Meta-pragmatics, Epistemology, Globalisation, The Triple Heritage

**Introduction**

Pragmatics has evolved through a long and tortuous trajectory as “one of the youngest in the widening field of linguistic inquiry” (Lawal, Ajayi and Raji, 1997:638). From its humble gestation in philology, through its fledgling infancy in the insightful and inspiring works of Austin (1962), Saddock (1974), Grice (1975), Searle (1976), Bach and Harnish (1979), Levinson (1980), Adebijaja (1982) and Leech (1983), among other pioneers, to its current maturity and stability as an enviable branch of linguistics. This is epitomised by Mey's (1993) epochal book, pragmatics: an introduction, Grundy's (1995) follow-up, suggestively titled “Doing pragmatics”, and the highly specialised journal of pragmatics which identifies with and projects the aims and purview of linguistic pragmatics in formulating questions and providing answers to enrich our

understanding of language as human tool for natural and societal interaction. Furthermore, pragmatics became a fairly regular feature in the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula of many universities across the Globe, in addition to several master's dissertations and doctoral theses in the field.

Thus, it would seem that the stage was set for Global pragmatics at the close of the 20th century, but with the dominant voice emerging from the Global North, in particular Europe and North-America, in tacit affirmation of the asymmetrical, economic, political, cultural and, in particular, epistemological relations between the North and the South in this knowledge/information-driven era of globalisation. These unequal relations have prompted Mazrui (2001) to label Western culture in relation to the ideology of globalisation as “pretender to universalism” (p.11). Lawal (2005) came on cue to note that globalisation is not more than a new label for an old concept - the latest historical point on the ideological continuum of imperialism beginning from slavery

and slave trade through colonialism to the neo-colonialism/post-colonialism of the present information Age. This is schematically illustrated in Figure 1.

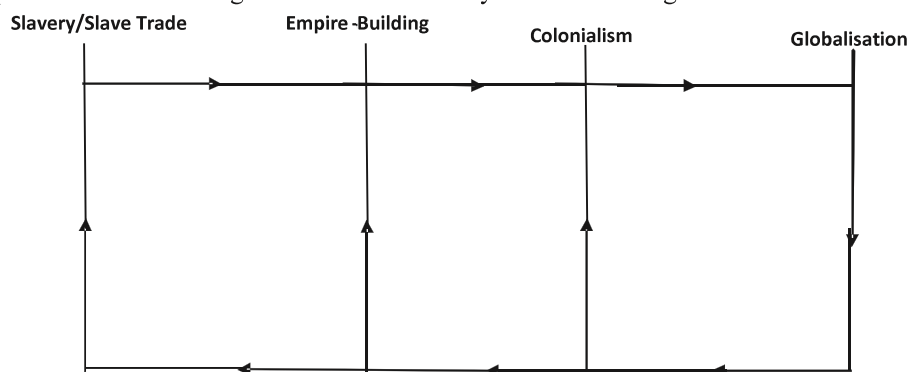


Figure 1: The Vicious Circle of Imperialism in Historical Perspective (Lawal, 2005)  
Globalisation is thus essentially a process of perpetuating and consolidating extant power relations through political, economic and cultural formations built and supported by knowledge-construction systems, which promote skewed interdependence between the dominant nations of the Global North and the dominated ones of the South. In this regard, it is possible to identify three types of influence or dependency:

- (a) Ideological and cultural penetrations from stronger to weaker nations, i.e. from the powerful political and economic centre of the world to the weak periphery;
- (b) Mutual penetrations among powerful nations, e.g. between the U.S. and U.K. or Germany; and Counter-penetrations from weak nations to strong ones which are difficult but not impossible as witnessed in the ascendancy of the Asian tigers, in particular Japan, China and Singapore.

As universally acknowledged in the dictum, “knowledge is power”, the more innovative and workable ideas a nation can generate and re-generate to drive both local and global politics, economy and culture, especially technology, the more powerful and influential the nation becomes in the comity of nations, i.e. the greater the capacity to control and influence one's destiny and the destinies of others in a virtuous circle of steady development. The opposite condition is a vicious circle of underdevelopment / imperialism which makes the powerful more powerful and the weak nations to become increasingly weaker, as illustrated in Figure 2.

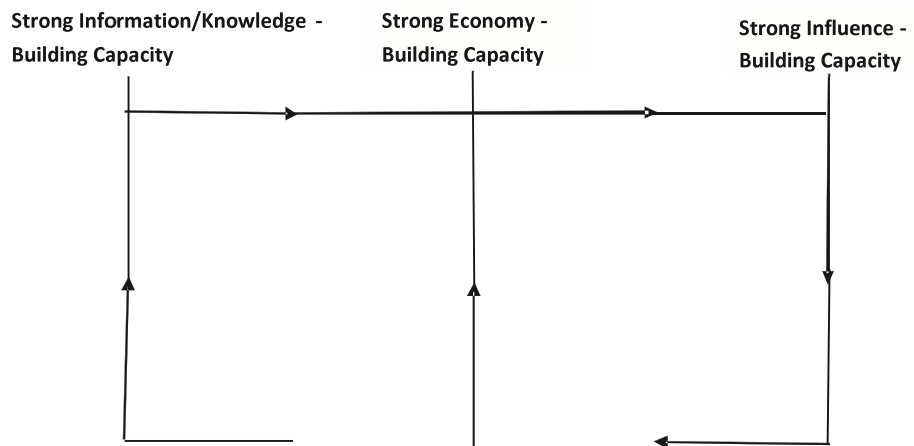


Figure 2: Vicious Circle of Imperialism from the Perspective of Influence-Building Capacity (Lawal, 2005)

From the two foregoing complementary models of development/ underdevelopment, it is evident that powerful epistemological systems are at the heart of Global hegemonic structures which in turn confer legitimacy on their knowledge-creating policies and institutions. Back to the hegemony in pragmatics and meta-pragmatics, the dominant theories and praxis in all the spheres of pragmatics – speech act theory, inferential theory, contextual pragmatics, face pragmatics, conversation analysis, pragmatic acts, literary pragmatics, pragmatics across cultures, and other aspects of micro-pragmatics and macro-pragmatics – are distinctly Euro-American. The inherent epistemological danger is to push a pre-determined theoretical or preceptual position from limited local data to the universal realm or, in the pungent words of Mazrui, to pass off “hegemonisation” as “homogenisation” but, in the informed persuasion of SkutnabbKangas, linguistic diversity, as opposed to reductionism, is imperative for a truly universal linguistics.

The implication of this, however, is that pragmatics scholars of the Global South must brace up for this epistemological gap and the challenges entailed in the development of African pragmatics, for instance, as a potent and respectable feeder into the

universal knowledge-pool of pragmatics and meta-pragmatics. It is high time we seized the initiative and responded creatively to foreign-imposed theories, precepts and models rather than being dogmatically receptive. African pragmaticians, in particular, should wean themselves from the complacency and docility of received knowledge. The negative aspect of the incursion of Noam Chomsky into African linguistics was the inability of many scholars to think beyond “the pursuit of crass formalism” and liberate themselves from what Bamgbose (2000) aptly labelled “the tyranny of trees” (p.2). The critical question at this juncture is: what is the ideological framework, the conceptual blue-print as well as the methodological road-map, which African scholars as a crucial subset of the Global periphery, can employ in liberating their pragmatics and metapragmatics from the hegemonic clutch of the Global centre, while at once building locally relevant but globally significant knowledge systems?

### **The Triple Heritage: Three Streams of Wisdom**

Three knowledge systems or “streams of wisdom” have fed the universal pool of knowledge and wisdom (Lawal, 2004, 2015), i.e. the traditional knowledge systems of indigenous peoples of the world as foundation, western civilisation with strong affiliation to Judeo-Christian cosmology and, lastly, Islamic civilisation. This is the Triple Heritage proposition, originally postulated by the late Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana but popularised by Prof. Ali Mazrui, who argues that the development and indeed the future of Africa lies in the way she is able to navigate through these three crisscrossing streams, and convert them to a harmonious, tri-pedal epistemology.

Lawal (2014) later drew a parallel with the three forms and contexts of education – informal (traditional) education at home, formal (western) education in the school and semi-formal/non-formal education in the Quranic and Sunday Schools, and in the larger society respectively. He further symbolised this triadic structure with a tripodal stool upon which Africa's future development squarely rests, the first leg being “orature” (representing the indigenous knowledge systems), the second “literature”, in a generic sense, representing western epistemology and the last, “scripture”, symbolising spiritual wisdom as gleaned from the great religions of the world, especially the three Abrahamic religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Of all these three main knowledge systems, the traditional one has been systematically undervalued, scandalised and subjugated through colonialism and western miseducation. For instance, Professor Trevor Roper, then of the Department of History at Oxford University, strove to misinform the world by claiming that there was nothing as African history other than what he derogated as “the unrewarding gyrations of barbaric tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the Globe” (Trevor Roper, 1964). His faulty argument is that History began when a people commit their past to writing, but modern historiography has since acknowledged the crucial role of the oral tradition as a viable historical source.

Furthermore, beginning with Egyptian civilisation, the world has benefitted immensely from African and Asian indigenous knowledge systems in the fields of writing, architecture, traditional medicine and the liberal arts. Many modern art forms and motifs, for instance, are rooted in African traditions, especially in the spheres of oral, visual and the performing arts. Deborah Klein, the anthropology professor at Gallivan college, Santa-Cruz, California, USA, was in Ilorin, Nigeria a couple of years ago to investigate closely the historical evolution of Fuji music from its humble beginning in **WERE** music among Muslims during the Ramadan Fasting month to its present international, cross-over generic status. In this regard, it is for their epistemological values that many universities in the western world have established centres and institutes of African and Asian studies.

The world has no doubt benefitted considerably from Islamic civilisation. Islamic epistemology had contributed to the universal pool of wisdom in the fields of mathematics, medicine and science. The decimal system in use today is based largely on the old Arabic numerals, with the invention of “zero” (0) being a watershed in the development of mathematics. The search for the Qibla direction in prayers by early Muslims provided impetus for geographical and astronomical studies, with the Ka'aba in Mecca taken as the centre of the Earth.

Coming to the field of linguistics, the fast-expanding lexicon of English attests to the positive influence and contributions of indigenous and modern knowledge systems from other cultures to western civilisation. Many words beginning with the definite article in Arabic “Al-” (e.g. alcohol, alchemy, algebra, algorithm and almanac) are loanwords from Arabic. “Robot” in English is from the Czech “robotanic”, while “novel” is from Spanish “novella”, “drama” from the ancient Greek “dromenon”, and “literacy” and “literature” from the Latin “litera”, and so on.

In the field of pragmatics, a lot stands to be gleaned and gained not only from indigenous knowledge systems but also from the Bible and the Qur'an.

### **Pragmatic and Metapragmatic Insights from Orature and Scripture**

Relying on what is hereby termed “meta-pragmatic imagination”, useful and far-reaching insights from folkloric and scriptural traditions. Following their historical order as implicated in the tri-pedal structure theory, indigenous epistemology, as epitomised by “orature” or “folklore,” is the veritable background and backbone of the proposed eclectic pragmatics.

#### **i. Orature**

Pragmaticians are “word-workers” in both pragmatic and meta-pragmatic senses. Hence, the word “word” can undoubtedly be regarded as the most fundamental meta-pragmatic term, hence “Doing things with words” (Austin, 1962) and “Doing

pragmatics” (Grundy, 1995). Across several languages of the world, including especially those of Africa, the “word” is a meta-pragmatic folk concept. For instance, in Yoruba, not only are words said or uttered, words can also be cold (mild), hot (intemperate), bitter (caustic or sarcastic) and generally good or bad. Furthermore, “a person can be pelted with words” (like stones). This is an important area for cross-cultural pragmatics and meta-pragmatics.

The following examples further indicate that “word” as a meta-pragmatic term is highly productive in the Yoruba language.

- (i) *Mo nuun l' oro.* (I forcibly fed him with [bitter] words).
- (ii) *Oro pesi je.* (Words have killed [defied] response). (iii) *Oro lo n bi oro.* (Words beget [provoke] words).

In example (i), the inference in Yoruba idiomatic wisdom is that words are not only said, they can be eaten as food, thus affirming cross-culturally Achebe's assertion in his highly celebrated novel *Things Fall Apart* that “among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe, 1980:5).

In example (ii), beyond merely saying or writing them, words can “kill” or “defy” response, thus providing meta-pragmatic exploration for the felicity or nonfelicity of certain face acts, or for pragmatic goofs or misfires and how violation of conversational norms can “kill” verbal interaction. Such violation is sometimes the basis for the felicity / non-felicity of jokes and this can also be investigated crossculturally.

In example (iii), “words beget words” is the most challenging but also promising for pragmatic theory. As language is the closest phenomenon to humankind and very crucial for our survival (Lawal, 2004), words are highly “productive”, giving birth to others just like their human users. The meta-pragmatic concept of “begetting” or “productivity” would prove insightful when deployed in discourse pragmatics to unravel the cohesion between micro-texts/micro-acts vs. macro-texts/macro-acts, and among “core-texts” or “fore-texts” (i.e. topic texts) and other inter-texts, i.e. related or implicated texts within or outside the macro-text. Inter-texts can be in the following forms:

- (a) Meta-text: any part of a text that “talks” about itself.
- (b) Micro-text/intra-text: a text that is part of a larger target text.
- (c) Extra-text: a text that is not directly related in place, time or circumstance to a target text but brought to bear on its explication.
- (d) Co-text: a text adjacent to a target text in time, space or situation.

- (e) Supra-text: a text that is not part of a target text but super-imposed on it in the forms of revision, editing, or deliberate distortion.
- (f) Sub-text: a background text implicated or alluded to by the target text and may be deployed to illustrate the target text.

The meta-pragmatic notion of “words begetting words” can be gainfully explored cross-culturally, especially within the African context, to postulate a theory of verbal continuity, which can be employed in the analysis of both literary and non-literary discourse to subsume, within a phenomenological perspective, the current intertextuality theory in literary criticism.

Proceeding from the meta-pragmatics of the “word” to that of proverbs, only one proverb would be used to illustrate the potential of proverbs for pragmatic theory. Lawal et al. (1997) employed proverbial data to illustrate Lawal's model of the aspects of a pragmatic theory with six hierarchical levels of competencies corresponding to six hierarchical levels of contexts to be invoked and deployed through inference in the analysis of speech acts. The following is the current proverbial datum:

(iv) *Eniti o l'aju l' oju n ti.* (Only the one who has “face” can be shame-faced.)

Unarguably, the concept of “face” in this proverb is not physical or denotative but metaphorical and meta-pragmatic. The pragmatic import of this proverb is that not everyone has “face”, self-esteem, self-honour or self-worth. This radically challenges Brown and Levinson's (1987) universalisation of politeness phenomena using limited data in the medium of just one language, claiming sweepingly that all human beings have “face”. The critical meta-pragmatic question raised through this new concept of “facelessness” in this and possibly other related proverbs intra-culturally or cross-culturally is: what contextual factors – situational, psychological, social, cultural and cosmological (Lawal et al., 1997) can account for “facelessness” and its concomitant, i.e. shamelessness?

To unravel this apparent theoretical contradiction, an investigation of abnormal / sub-normal use of language in certain self-degrading sub-cultures may be quite apposite. For instance, the factors responsible for the moral degradation of *Were*, an old Yoruba-Islamic lyrical genre, to the “faceless” level of the gutter language in certain modernist and bohemian strands of present-day Fuji music demand urgent historio-pragmatic research.

## ii. Scripture

As hinted earlier on, the two pre-eminent scriptures among Africans, as a result of the colonial history and experience, are The Bible and The Qur'an.

## Pragmatic and Metapragmatic Insights from the Bible

### i. The Word

The Bible begins suggestively in John 1:1 with phonotactic mellifluity and a complex precept on the meta-pragmatics of the word: “In the Beginning was The Word, the word was with God and God is The Word” (All the graphological foregrounding in this text is that of the present writer.). It is important that the motivation for the pragmatic distinction in the use of the upper or lower case for both the “T” in “The” and the “W” in “Word” is grounded in the English grapho-lexicology as evidenced, for instance, by the difference between “God” and “god”.

In the Biblical verse cited above, “the word” is used in two senses: The Word as God and “the word” as God’s Creative Command, which the Bible refers to as “Let there be!” (Genesis 1:3, i.e. “Let there be light”), but the Qur’an laconically reports this Divine Command as “Be!”. The preliminary inference at this juncture, which will be corroborated with the Qur’anic insights shortly, is that God is the Original, Quintessential Creative Energy; His Peremptory, Creative Command “Be” with which He brought and still brings into “being” or existence all elements in His Boundless Creation is “the word”, “the essential word”; while all the myriad and infinite creations or appearances or consequences of His Command are mere *words* at the lowest phenomenological level of reality (Lawal, 2016).

### ii. Complex Speech Acts by Jesus Christ

The Gospel, according to Matthew, gives an account of the arrest and trial of Jesus Christ for purported blasphemy (sin against God) and treason (sin against the emperor and the state) during which certain questions were posed to him.

- (a) When asked whether he was “the son of God,” Jesus was not emphatic and direct but instead resorted to a simple, concise but profound statement, a complex speech act: “Thou sayest”. The possible meanings of this short but perplexing utterance are of high pragmatic and meta-pragmatic significance, pointing to the nature and types of speech acts. Some of these plausible meanings include:
- (i) “You say so; I do not” (which would negate the idea of “my only begotten son” in Matthew IV:17).
  - (ii) “You say what you do not understand” (i.e. sonship of God is a metaphor for spiritual servant-hood of God, not in the biological sense of begetting or procreation).
  - (iii) “You say what you understand to be a figure of speech, but you have chosen the literal (locutionary or grammatical) meaning for mischief” (Lawal, 2009).



All these possibilities imply that:

- (i) one can say what one does not mean or even understand (How may this explain pragmatic “facelessness”?)
  - (ii) one can say what one understands to be “indirect” but can present it as “direct” (How can this account for certain speech and pragmatic acts in jokes, political campaign speeches and legal arguments?)
  - (iii) in other words, one can say the exact thing somebody else has said (locution) but give it a different meaning (illocution) so as to use it for a different practical end (perlocution).
- (b) In the same trial scene in the Gospel according to Matthew and elsewhere, Jesus was asked whether he was the king of the Jews. Jesus responded once more with a simple statement, but a multiple speech act: “My kingdom is not of this world”. Does this mean that the heavenly kingdom belongs to Jesus, even after he had in the same Gospel of Matthew claimed in the Paternoster that “Thy (God's) kingdom come”, “Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” and that all “Power and Glory belong (only) to God “forever and ever”.

The pragmatic insights and in-roads to the interpretation of this speech act must be based on linguistic evidence of the asymmetrical relationship between grammatical meaning (locution) and pragmatic meaning (illocution) as illustrated with the following:

- (i) This is **my** town (nativity or residence, not possession).
- (ii) This is **my** university (place of work or schooling, not ownership).
- (iii) Obama is **my** man (man of my love).
- (iv) **My** flight will be at dawn (travelling not ownership).
- (v) That's **my** car! (the car of my dream or desire, not necessarily possession).
- (vi) I am going to **my** kingdom, i.e. United Kingdom (UK) or Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) – nativity or residence, not possession.
- (vii) **My** paradise is not of this world (the paradise of my hope, desire, or which I have been preaching).

Thus, if we inter-textually interpret “Thy kingdom come” and other verses of the Bible where Jesus Christ speaks of the Uniqueness, Absoluteness, Perfection and Incomparability of God in relation to “My kingdom is not of this world”, it would be pragmatically clear that the kingdom in question is that of God, about which Jesus Christ had been preaching and in which he had hoped, as God pleases, he would be one of the Nearest to God (Lawal, 2009). This underscores the high surrender value of pragmatics in scriptural exegesis to which African pragmaticians should direct their empirical searchlight.

## Pragmatic and Metapragmatic Insights from the Qur'an

### i. The Word

All the complex principles and precepts in the ever-widening purview of pragmatics have been graphically and laconically summed up in the Qur'an when God refers to His Absolute Will, His Creative Power:

“When He (God) has **decreed something**, He only **says** to it “Be” and **it is**” (Al-Baqarah, II:117; Al-Imran, III:47; Maryam, XIX: 35; Ghaffir, XL:68)

It is also said elsewhere in the Qur'an that

Indeed, **Our word** to a thing when We **intend** it is but We **say** to it, “**Be**”, and **it is** (Al-Nahl, XVI :40).

His command when He **intend** sathing is only that He **says** to it “**Be**”, and **it is** (Ya-seen, XXXII:82)

In these terse epigrammatic quotations, which re-echo The Bible's John 1:1, but in a more lucid and comprehensive manner, is the very nucleus of pragmatic theory and the major distinction between human will and the Divine Will, between the limitation in what man can “do” with what he “means” and “says” and what God instantaneously and simultaneously “does” with whatever He 'means” and says in Perfect and Absolute terms. Whatever God **decrees** or **intends** is the illocutionary act, His “**Be!**” is the locutionary act, while “**it is**” is the perlocutionary act, all of which acts are not subject to the variable vagaries of time, space and circumstance and are united as one big ultracomplex act in perpetuity. This affords us a glimpse through the scriptural window into the possibility of metaphysical or phenomenological pragmatics as a new branch of pragmatics with initiative from our own little corner in the Global periphery.

In furtherance of the meta-pragmatics of **the word** as God's creative command producing infinite Creation, the Qur'an has this to say:

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink) with seven oceans behind it to add to its supply, yet the **words** of Allah would not be exhausted (in writing). For Allah is exalted in Power, Full of Wisdom (Luqman: xxxi:27).

Thus, in phenomenological pragmatics, we have three levels of the concept of “word”:(i) **The Word**, representing God Himself as the Author of all Creation; (ii) His Creative Will and Command is **the word**“Be!”; and the consequences of the command are **words** in His Vast, Infinite Creation (Lawal, 2004, 2016b).

ii. Pragmatic Applications and Implications in Qur'anic Exegesis

One unique attribute of the Qur'an is the un-equalled preponderance of metatextual references. Indeed, the Qur'an can be aptly described as a book of meta-texts, through which the Book identifies itself, its source, its qualities and how it should be approached, read and appreciated. The Qur'an variously describes itself as a "Book in which there is no doubt for the Believer" (Al-Baqara, II:2); a "Book full of wisdom" (Yunus, X:1); a Book "which makes things clear" (Al-Hijr, XV:1); a Book which "contains its own evidence" (Ankabut, XXIV:47-49), etc.

On the question: what happens when revelations are revised, edited and distorted, the Qur'an has an incisive answer in the following:

- (a) "Do they not consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from one other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many a contradiction?" (An-Nisai, IV:82)
- (b) "Verily we, it is, who have sent the Reminder (i.e. the Qur'an) and, surely, we will guard it (against corruption)?" (Al-Hijr, XV:9)

(c) "Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it" (Fusilat, XLI:42)  
What then happens in the face of apparent contradictions? This is where pragmaticians must deploy pragmatic principles and canons to scriptural interpretation as previously applied to the biblical text. Applying this precept to the Qur'an, let us consider the following two seemingly contradictory statements:

- (i) "**O my servants** who have transgressed against their souls!  
Despair not of the mercy of Allah:  
**For Allah forgives all sins;**  
For He is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful" (Az-zummar, XXXIX:53)
- (ii) "**Allah forgives not that partners Should be set up with Him**  
But He forgiveth anything else  
To whom He pleaseth: to set up  
Partners with Allah is to devise  
A sin most heinous indeed" (An-Nisa, IV:48)

Inability to establish necessary pragmatic connections and mappings among related texts is responsible for the apparent contradiction in the two foregoing Qur'anic texts. "Allah forgives all sins" in Text (i) but excludes polytheism in the text since it is addressed to Believers whom God addresses endearingly as "**O my servants**". Conversely, Text (ii), addressed to polytheists, specifies polytheism as an unforgivable crime which is "most heinous indeed". Therefore, deploying pragmatic

tools and tenets in scriptural exegesis is a fertile area in which African pragmatics can make its mark and enrich both Global pragmatics and meta-pragmatics.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the imperative for the marginalised South to speak meaningfully to the centre of Global pragmatics and secure the right audience. To do this, African scholars should appreciate the need to actively interrogate “received knowledge” which is largely a product of limited and localised data informing pragmatic theory, praxis and practice. It has also been suggested that the three epistemological streams in the Triple Heritage theory should be the ideological tripod supporting this rethinking and re-orientation. As such, through what we have labelled as “meta-pragmatic imagination”, theoretical and empirical pragmatics would have to be re-invented by tapping knowledge and wisdom, especially from the oral traditions of marginalised societies. This requires imaginative attention to the linguistic, psychological, social and cultural routines which reveal and shape the critical features and dimensions of human interaction.

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*The Bible* (King James' Version)

*The Qur'an* (as translated by M. T. Ali-Hilali and M. M. Khan and printed by “King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an” in Medina, KSA)

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## PRAGMATICS: THE EXPANDING FRONTIERS

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### Abstract

This paper is a keynote address presented at the second workshop of the NPrA, at Bowen University, Iwo, in April, 2019. It examines the consistent growth of Pragmatics from its inception as an academic discipline to its current profile as a full-grown linguistic research direction. It discusses modern approaches to pragmatics and highlights interesting research topics that have been studied at the postgraduate level in Nigeria Universities. The paper concludes with suggestions on key areas that the NPrA should concentrate its efforts in order to facilitate professional practice in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, pragmatic approaches, theory, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Quoting copiously from the speech of the President of NPrA, Prof. Akin Odegunmi:

*The concern of a pragmatics association is not only academic; it is also professional and societal. Pragmatics is one of the disciplines of the Arts that can offer a lot of practical benefits to society. Apart from equipping the student with the skills for daily bread, it is capable of providing such facilities as the dexterity to launch interventions into medicine, politics, domestic life, diplomacy, religion and the media. Its theories and other professional mechanisms permit entry into the human mind, help to track communicative choices and explain the complexity of all human engagements situated in linguistic and non-linguistic acts. Thus, pragmatics becomes well suited to enhance services not only in the academia but also in the industries and other public domains where determining interactive agenda and managing intentions are desired for efficiency and productivity. The Nigerian Pragmatics Association has the goal to ensure the achievement of all the facets of the potentials of the discipline of pragmatics. For us, the first step is to entrench the knowledge of the discipline for the benefits of students who are interested in pragmatics and scholars who desire to join the global debates in the discipline... Silent in these aspirations is the desire by NPrA*

to extend the frontiers of pragmatics research and professional practice in Nigeria. I thought I should participate in the realization of these noble goals, and that informs my choice of theme for the current keynote speech.

### **Pragmatics in the Beginning**

Two general trends have characterised the study of pragmatics since its origins: Gricean pragmatics, influenced by the works of H.P. Grice and J.L. Austin, and post-Gricean pragmatics, seen as a departure from the initial theoretical motivations of the former. Gricean pragmatics explicitly represents an attempt to reconcile the semantics of formal and natural languages, through the distinction between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning. The former offers the attempted reconciliation, whereas the latter accounts for the richness of the communicated content (that can go well beyond the linguistically encoded content). The emphasis on the distinction between the truth-conditional content of the utterance (just minimally affected by pragmatic contributions) and the non-truth-conditional aspects of the communicated content (entirely pragmatically motivated) has laid the foundation for a flourishing investigation on the interface between semantics and pragmatics. For many decades, in fact, pragmatics has been conceived as primarily focused on assessing the extent to which context interacts with the linguistically encoded meaning to determine the communicated content of an utterance, at the level of both explicit and implicit communication. This trend is an ongoing feature of the state of the art within pragmatics.

Gricean pragmatics has been strongly committed to a philosophically-oriented perspective. Grice (1967) introduced an inferential model of communication based on the idea that hearers infer the speaker's meaning from the evidence provided by the conventional linguistic meaning of his/her utterance. This model does not strive for psychological plausibility. The Cooperative Principle and the Conversational Maxims are generally seen as guiding principles for a rational reconstruction of pragmatic interpretation. Issues concerning the nature of the actual cognitive processes which underpin utterance interpretation are left largely unexplored. The seminal work on 'Relevance Theory' by Sperber & Wilson (1986/1995) has considerably reduced the gap between studies of communication and the cognitive sciences, integrating the previous philosophically-based pragmatic tradition with a more cognitively-oriented perspective: "Pragmatics is an empirical science, but one with philosophical origins and philosophical import" (Wilson & Sperber 2012, p. 1).

Cognitive pragmatics, thus, approaches verbal comprehension as a psychological process, which is open to empirical investigations based on methodologies borrowed from psycholinguistics, developmental studies, neuropsychology and other cognitive sciences. Interestingly, this change of perspective has also contributed to the emergence of new lines of research, which address issues that had not been explored



before from either a philosophical or an experimental perspective. On-line pragmatic process is one such instance of cognitive pragmatics that has received substantial contributions from linguists, philosophers of language and cognitive scientists (Carston 2007, Recanati 2002, 2004, 2007, Mazzone 2011, and Wilson & Carston 2007).

### **Current Approaches to Pragmatics**

Drawing from the work of *Piotr Cap & Joanna Nijakowska (eds.) (2007), namely Current Trends in Pragmatics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) one can appreciate a set of new approaches to pragmatics. In these new approaches, there is an entirely new spectrum of ideas and methodologies that are multidimensional and multidisciplinary.

Pragmatics does not deal with language *as such* but with *language use* and the relationships between language form and language use. Using language involves *cognitive* processes, taking place in a *social* world with a variety of *cultural* constraints. Thus, to pursue any study of pragmatics is to inevitably indulge oneself in multidisciplinary considerations.

The contributions of various strands of linguistics to the current shape of pragmatics as a scientific discipline started long ago (see Jef Verschueren (1999) *Understanding Pragmatics*, for a comprehensive account of the development of pragmatics in the 20th century). The resulting degree of cross-fertilization of the linguistic fields of investigation with ideas reflecting the scope of pragmatics as defined above is indeed dazzling. Consider the following brief outline.

Many types of interaction have been observed between anthropological linguists (studying the relationships between languages and cultures), sociolinguists (concerned with the ways in which social relationships, patterns, and networks interact with language structure and language use), neurolinguists (trying to reveal the neurophysiological aspects of speaking and listening), psycholinguists (studying the relationships between language and mind in general) and developmental psycholinguists (concentrating on the ontogenetic origin and evolution of language); linguists and philosophers of language (often focusing on a rather narrow, though itself quite diversified, range of topics: speech act theory as the philosophical study of language in action, proposing the “speech act” as the basic unit of analysis); conversational logicians formulating rules for conversational exchanges, and reflecting on how these influence interpretation processes, and linguists studying presuppositions in an attempt to determine what implied propositions have to be true for an expression to be appropriately used; those dealing with the given/new and topic/comment distinctions trying to discover how “common” or “mutual” knowledge is reflected in sentence structure, and how it gets gradually extended in a text). Others are text linguists and discourse analysts (describing how macrostructural properties of

texts and discourses relate to processes and strategies of discourse progression); conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists (undertaking detailed linguistic analyses of conversational exchanges in order to unravel their most intricate mechanisms, often viewed as manifestations of microsociological patterns and relationships), and many other scholars in the language-related sciences. Yet they are often still inclined to pursue their interests within the confines of their own disciplines and sub-disciplines, with different aims and methodologies, and with various divergent and confusingly overlapping terminologies.

### **Researching Pragmatics in Select Nigerian Universities**

Presented in this section is a random selection of research topics in pragmatics at Master's and PhD levels in Nigerian universities in the last few years. They are largely, but not entirely, tethered to the Gricean theory. They are largely pragmatic analyses of:

1. Sensational headlines in Nigerian newspapers
2. Ambiguity in political discourse
3. Truth value in newspaper editorials
4. Written toast in wedding cards
5. Language use by bus drivers, conductors and student passengers
6. Graffiti on university campuses
7. Language of diplomacy in interviews, speeches, etc.
8. Pragmatic analysis of novels
9. Compliments in social discourse
10. Persuasion in advertisements
11. Language of court proceedings
12. Military coup speeches

### **Pragmatics in other Climes**

One can get great insights into the activities of pragmaticians in other climes by taking a glance at the proceedings of the third International Conference of the American Pragmatics Association (AMPRA), at Indiana University, Bloomington, November 46, 2016. The presentations at the conference were broken down into major sub-themes such as pragmatic theory, **discourse and service encounters, second language pragmatics and teaching, pragmatics interface: syntax, semantics, interactions and service encounters, speech acts and communication, computer-mediated communication, pragmatics of human interactions, and survival skills in foreign environments. Others include e-mail discourse strategies, discourse markers, intercultural pragmatics, (im)politeness, discourse and interaction, intercultural service encounters in a global world, corpus linguistics and discourse, and evidentials and epistemic meaning. These and a host of other**

**works point the direction taken by pragmatics theory and practice in other parts of the world. Most of these works were anchored on the post-Gricean pragmatic theories we have discussed earlier. The question now is, are there any insights for NPrA in its desire to expand its own frontiers of pragmatics practice?**

### **Going Beyond Theory and Mere Academics**

Having come this far, we can now ask this question: what/how can NPrA contribute to the Nigeria society and professional practice?

In my view, NPrA should have the following as its major pre-occupation: it should be an association that supports scholarly research in both theoretical and applied pragmatics in general, but with specific focus on the various sub-fields that have emerged over time, including the linguistic, cognitive, historical, social, inter-cultural and inter-language paradigms of pragmatics. On theories of pragmatics for instance, issues demanding attention should include (starting from the old) explicature, implicature, speech act theory, presuppositions, politeness, the neo-Gricean approaches, relevance theory, theory of the mind, grammaticalization, meaning, role of context, common ground, semantics-pragmatics interface, etc.

Other areas of pragmatics asking for attention, especially from the *intercultural, crosscultural and social perspectives include, but are not restricted to* interlanguage pragmatics, variational pragmatics, social pragmatics, studies involving more than one language and culture, or varieties of one language, intercultural pragmatics, lingua franca, computer-mediated communication (CMC), bilingual speakers' language use, intercultural misunderstandings, language of aggression and conflict, etc.

In applied pragmatics, NPrA should examine, more closely, aspects such as the acquisition of pragmatic skills, developmental pragmatics, pragmatic competence, corpus-based approaches, pragmatic variations within one language and across languages, cyber pragmatics, etc.

In the professional space, it is pertinent to ask the following questions. What can the Nigerian pragmatics scholar contribute to facilitate professional practice in Nigeria? This mega-question can be broken down into several profession-specific questions as follows. How, for example, can doctor-patient communication be facilitated in Nigeria? What roles do pragmatic scholars have in helping politicians and political leaders construct efficient political speeches, rally addresses, and party manifestoes? How can party spokespersons enhance electoral success for their candidates? In domestic life, what are the patterns of gender differences in communication? Are there gender wars? Do pragmatic scholars have a role in resolving them? Going beyond theory, what can a member of NPrA do to ease the challenges of leadership and diplomacy in Nigeria? In the religious sphere, we all know the power wielded by

clergymen and how their speeches and sermons can move their followers. Beyond mere pragmatic analysis of such speeches and sermons, what else can a pragmatic scholar contribute to the sphere? We also know how the mass media shape mind-sets and set agenda for public discourse. Is the media a special preserves of media practitioners alone, or do pragmaticians have a role in it as well? If the answer to the question is yes; what then is their role? How can pragmaticians help address the menace of hate speech and fake news? How can they aid forensic science and the gathering of evidence at scenes of crime on the social media, or can they? In what ways can pragmatic scholars participate in the digital world? Do they have a role in web site and page content development, especially from the language perspective? A host of other pertinent questions are staring NPrA in the eye as we deliberate here this morning.

Until and unless we provide answers to these questions, the aspirations of NPrA cited at the beginning of this keynote speech cannot be met adequately.

#### **Appreciation**

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the organisers of this workshop cum conference for finding me worthy of invitation to present a keynote speech. I wish NPrA speedy realization of its aspirations, and participants, fruitful deliberations.

**Prof. Mustapha Ahmad Isa is Vice-Chancellor of the Yusuf Maitama Sule University, Kano.**

**NEW MEDIA AND THE WEB AS CORPORA: EXPLORING  
RESEARCH PROJECTS IN DIGITAL HUMANITIES**

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**Abstract**

This paper was originally a guest lecture at the 1<sup>st</sup> Lagos Summer School in Digital Humanities (LSSDH), held at the University of Lagos in September, 2018. The lecture examined the very important synergy between the humanities (in our case linguistics) and computer science. Hence, this paper explains this synergy, and discusses why digitization has become a concept that is increasingly fundamental for doing linguistics, such as pragmatics and discourse analysis. The paper also describes methods and digital tools for doing linguistics and gives important examples of research projects in Nigeria and abroad in discourse analysis and pragmatics that had applied digital methods. The study argues that, since Nigerian scholars can no longer deny the impact of digital media and the role of digital technology as research tools, we must now begin to respond to the extent of knowledge and skills needed to doing digital humanities. The paper concludes with suggestions on how this response may be carried out.

**Keywords:** Digital humanities, technology, media, data, Internet.

**Introduction**

Doing research in digital humanities (DH) appears as a demand to take arts and humanities experts (e.g. linguists) from their “comfort zone” to an adventure into new related areas in the Social Science and ICT –exposing them to common areas of collaboration, and introducing new approaches and methods that are beneficial to their disciplines. “Digital humanities” has been described as a range of new media applications that converge at the intersection of technology and the humanities and the roles of information technology in humanities scholarship. This encompasses a wide range of domains and communities of practice including computer-assisted research, library studies, pedagogy and content development in humanities disciplines like literature, language studies, history or philosophy (Chen & Hsueh, 2014).

The new media implementations and effects in the humanities are clear in the range of ICT-related initiatives such as digital libraries, visualization, text mining, natural language processing (NLP), technology-based teaching, geographic information systems (GIS), multimedia, social networking, and digital culture among others (Rieger, 2010).

### The Web as Corpora

The Internet has been a big source of primary or secondary data for scholarly studies in the humanities. Thus, whether data is sourced from email, YouTube, online conferencing, online forums, Facebook, Twitter, website etc., the Web (or cyber space) has served as a network, not only for the exchange of data between computers but also as a space where relationships, communities and cultures emerge and texts or images (as data) are exchanged in real time or archive until later time when they are accessed and processed (Herring, 2004). Because of the huge body of data generated and exchanged on the Internet, it is correct to describe the web itself as “corpora” for any kind of study that requires “big data” and special technical skills to access, organize, and analyse them. Depending on the type of study, data are available on the web for any qualitative or quantitative research. Let me comment briefly on the concept of *Big Data*.

### Big Data

It is difficult to talk of online data or digital corpora— their types, volumes, and who generates them without reference to “big data.” Big data is a concept used when data volumes, number of transactions and the number of data sources are so big and complex that they require special methods and technologies to analyse them. Hence, big data is defined in terms of the *volume* (the fact that data are large), *velocity* (i.e. data flow - the fact that data from large amounts of transactions with data streams coming at great speed) and *variety* of data (data comes from different sources and formats, from structured data semi-structured data and unstructured data such as text, images, video streams, audio statements etc. (Su, 2017). To specifically answer the question about what type of data there are on the Web, the following are identified:

1. Web data (e.g. for studying customer web behavior) from page views, searches, reading reviews, purchasing etc.;
2. Text data – email, news, Facebook feed, tweets, documents etc.;
3. Time and location data – GPS and mobile phone as well as Wi-Fi connection makes time and location information available;
4. Social network data – Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram etc.

Big data (comprising structured and unstructured data), is so complex that the traditional processing techniques and/or algorithms are no longer able to deal with them. Hence, the place of big data analytics, which aims to reveal hidden patterns, moving from a model-driven science paradigm to a data-driven science paradigm, and resting on the interplay of technology – maximizing computational power and algorithmic accuracy to gather,

analyze, link and compare large data sets. Analysis draws on data sets to identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical and legal claims. And there is the belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with truth, objectivity and accuracy that can guide important business or political decisions (Taylor-Sakyi, 2016, p.1).

### **Methods and Genres in Digital Humanities**

*From the book: Debates in Digital Humanities* (Gold, 2012), cited in the Hunter Library Research Guide, (<http://researchguides.wcu.edu/digitalhumanities/toolsmethods>), the following “emerging methods and genres,” for DH have been identified:

- (i) **Enhanced Critical Curation**  
Object-based arguments through the curation of digital media, including collection repositories and scholarly narratives supported by digitized or born digital primary source materials.
- (ii) **Augmented Editions and Fluid Textuality**  
Digital critical editions, marked up and encoded texts, often created through crowd-sourced methods and open to perpetual revision, annotation, and remix.
- (iii) **Scale: The Law of Large Numbers**  
As data sets grow larger and larger, humanists hope to create new findings through computational and algorithmic-enabled interpretations of our digitized and born-digital culture materials.
- (iv) **Distant/Close, Macro/Micro, Surface/Depth**  
In contrast to, and often in conjunction with, close reading, distant reading looks to understand and analyze large corpora across time through “trends, patterns, and relationships.”
- (v) **Cultural Analytics, Aggregation, and Data-Mining**  
Through computational means, cultural analytics mines, studies, and displays cultural materials in new aggregated or remixed forms, often including interactive and narrativized visualizations
- (vi) **Visualization and Data Design**  
Arguments made from the visualization of data, including virtual/spatial representations, geo-referencing and mapping, simulated environments, and other designs constructed from and informed by data.

(vii) **The Animated Archive**

In which the static archive of the past is made alive and virtually experiential, including the active archiving of physical spaces through virtual means, and multi-modal/faceted approaches to collection access and interactivity.

(viii) **Distributed Knowledge Production and Performative Access**

Digital projects take collaborative teams that cross both disciplines and borders and that often challenge the idea of “the author” through team contributions, crowdsourcing, and the user-based performance of the “text.”

(ix) **Humanities Gaming**

Taking on “historical simulation,” humanities gaming uses virtual learning environments to create interactive narratives that engage users and enable the exploration of humanist themes.

(x) **Code, Software, and Platform Studies**

Humanists have studied texts, the book, and many other forms of writing, so what to make of the code programmers write, the software computer users use, and the platforms that shape our social and cultural interactions?

(xi) **Database Documentaries**

Multi-modal narratives formed from a database, branching out into multiple paths users explore, possibly incorporating live-feed data, all calling into question authorial control/intent and the role of the reader.

(xii) **Repurposable Content and Remix Culture**

Digital content can be read, written, and rewritten, and as such all-digital objects are subject to sample, migration, translation, remix, and other forms of critical reuse.

(xiii) **Pervasive Infrastructure**

Our digital realities encompass many types of machines and screens and increasingly our objects are stored in the cloud, distributed over servers in multiple locations, so what does that mean for humans and data?

**Methods and Tools for Linguistics/Discourse Studies**

Herring (2004), gives a summary of five discourse analysis paradigms commonly used in Computer-Mediated Discourse (CDA) research as shown in table 1. Depending on their objectives and research questions, analysts would normally adopt specific discourse analytical paradigms that define issues of theoretical interest, a set of discourse



phenomena and discovery of procedures that may reveal the patterns and constraints that characterize the phenomena.

Table 1: Discourse Analysis Paradigms (Herring, 2004, p.341-342)

	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Phenomena</b>	<b>Procedures</b>
Text Analysis (cf. Longacre, 1996)	classification, description, 'texture' of texts	genres, schematic organization, reference, salience, cohesion, etc.	identification of structural regularities within and across texts
Conversation Analysis (cf. Psathas, 1995)	interaction as a jointly negotiated accomplishment	turn-taking, sequences, topic development, etc.	close analysis of the mechanics of interaction; unit is the turn
Pragmatics (cf. Levinson, 1983)	language as an activity (i.e. 'doing things' with words)	speech acts, relevance, politeness, etc.	interpretation of speakers' intentions from discourse evidence
Interactional Sociolinguistics (cf. Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1993)	role of culture in shaping and interpreting interaction	verbal genres, discourse styles, (mis)communication, framing, etc.	analysis of the socio-cultural meanings indexed through interaction
Critical Discourse Analysis (cf. Fairclough, 1992)	discourse as a site in which power and meaning are contested and negotiated	transitivity, presupposition, intertextuality, conversational control, etc.	interpretation of meaning and structure in relation to ideology, power dynamics

Hitherto, much of these paradigms and approaches have largely adopted qualitative methodology bearing in mind the nature of (unstructured) data available to researchers. Interestingly, digital tools have been used to study some of the above discourse phenomena. For instance, *Sentiment Analysis* (or stance in discourse - a type of text analysis) have been studied using *data analytics/machine learning* to predict election results in the past with high degrees of accuracy (e.g. The UK election of 2015 and the Nigerian election results of 2015) See Fig. 1 below from Odeneye 2015 (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/predictive-analytics-nigeria-2015-election-usinganalysis-odeneye/>)

Fig. 1 The model used for the prediction (using KNIME)

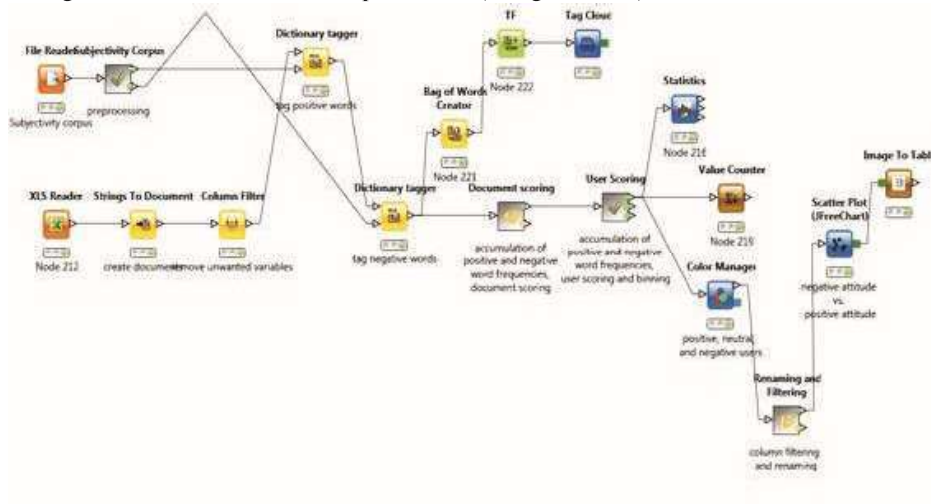
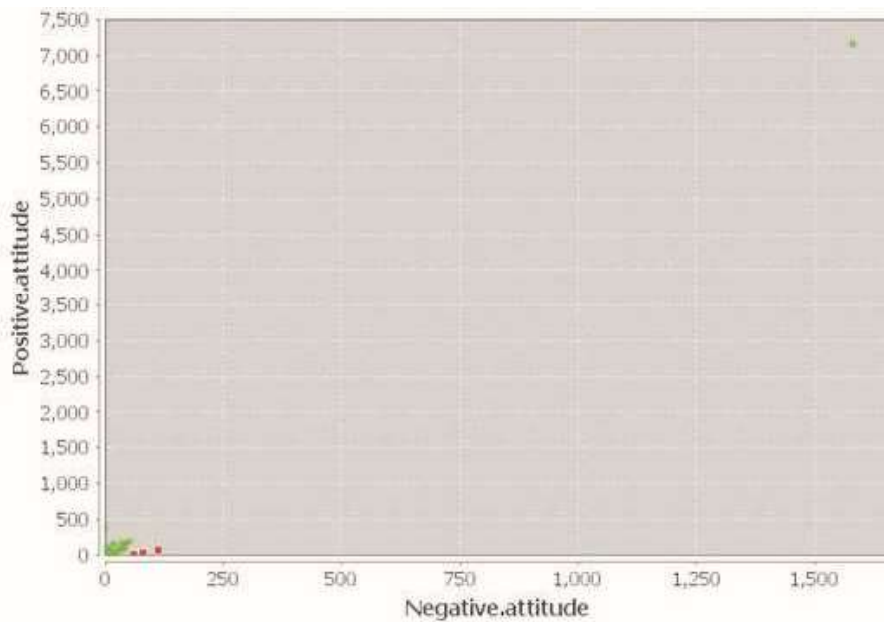


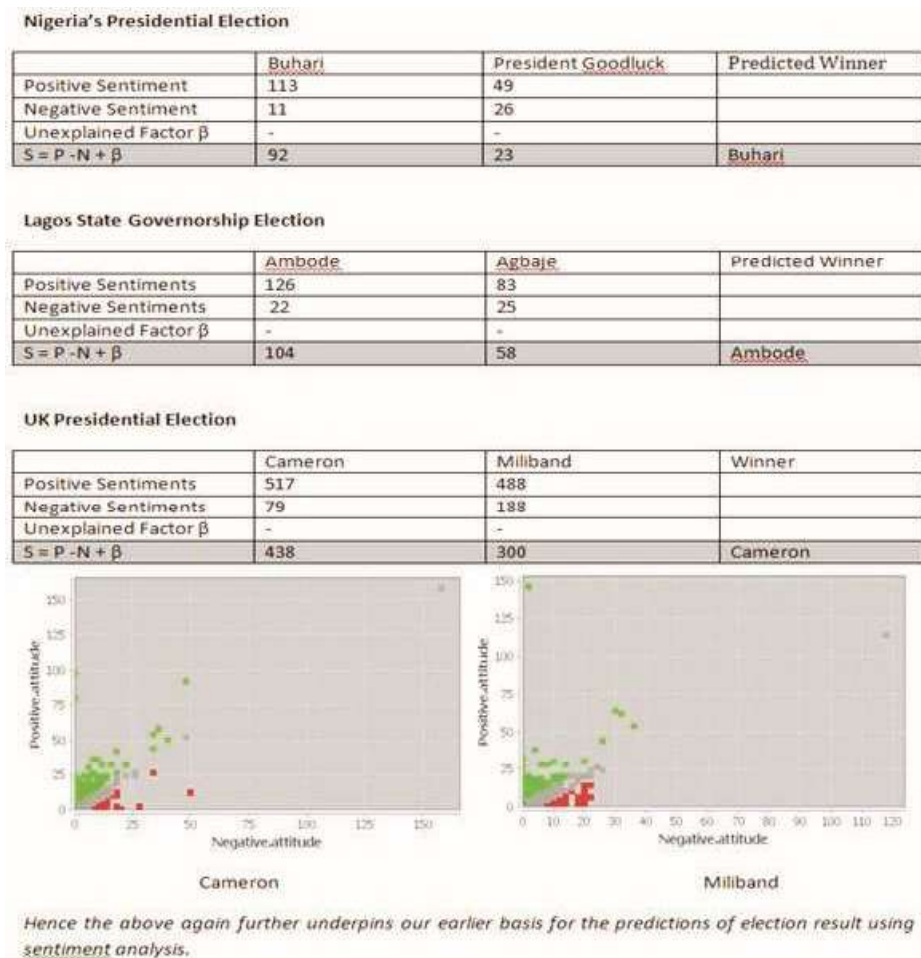
Table 2.

*A Scatter plot showing both positive and negative sentiments about Buhari*



Before table 2, there was a tag (word) cloud that showed negative and positive sentiments about Buhari. See also Odeneye 2015. (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/uk-election-the-pollsters-got-wrong-sentiment-analysis-adeyemi-odeneye/>).

Table 3: Polarity tables (using KNIME) also from Odeneye 2015



### **Big Data Approaches to Study Discourse Processes (Jones & Melody, 2017)**

As noted, human interaction has increasingly shifted online and this has generated enormous streams of data; and as the Internet has proved to be a vast repository of social engagement and discourses, there are vast curated text corpora available, mined from wide range of online interactive environments, such as social networks, blogs, comment boards, community forums, review sites etc. and a lot more is still available that can be selectively crawled, mined and curated.

Also, offline resources are increasingly being digitized, leading to the creation of multimillion-word subtitle corpora, covering film, television, and radio; the digital archives of major national newspapers and periodicals, and the scanning of millions of books and articles. (An example of this, is the *Hathi Trust Digital Library*—an effort to digitize and provide searchable access to the millions of volumes in America's research library).

### **NLP Tools and Databases**

Increase in the availability of raw data online, has produced a need for tools to mine these largely unstructured text sources, some of such tools are useful to empirically test “intuitions about patterns of register variation, narrative structure, and to make genre comparisons...” (Jones & Melody, 2017, p.2).

### **Examples:**

- (i) HathiTrust Digital Library (<https://www.hathitrust.org/>) composed largely of book sources - the largest collection of corpora so far for this kind of analysis). It contains of a variety of tools and *APIs* that can be used by researchers in data-driven discourse analysis. (API stands for “application programming interface” – a software intermediary, that allows two applications to talk to each other).
- (ii) *Talk Bank* by Brian MacWhinney's group (see <http://talkbank.org> for data and tools). This comprises large sources of conversation, including childdirected speech, second-language tutoring, dementia transcripts, and conversation data linked with video.
- (iii) The *Brigham Young Corpus (BYU) Repository* (<http://corpus.byu.edu/>), curated by Mark Davies - contains contemporary, historical, political speech, and book corpora, as well as other unconventional sources such as American soap operas. Each corpus is completely searchable with customizable tool, and helpful for discourse analysts studying register,

- dialect, or genre variations to study historical change, and to create experimental stimuli based on a variety of contextual factors.
- (iv) CohMetrix (McNamara, Graesser, McCarthy, & Cai, 2014), for the analysis of unstructured data. It is designed to evaluate semantic coherence within texts, including metrics on referential cohesion, syntactic complexity, and pattern densities, and measures based on situation models. Crossley, Kyle, and McNamara (2015) have recently expanded on CohMetrix with their TAAC software (Tool for the Automatic Analysis of Text Cohesion), which allows for offline largescale batch processing of texts.
  - (v) TACIT (Text Analysis, Crawling, and Interpretation Tool (<http://tacit.usc.edu>) (Dehghani et al. 2016).

“Often, the curated text corpora and search tools are inadequate for a researcher's purposes, which may require exploring how language is used in the real world across very specific times or following the occurrence of specific social events. In cases such as these, a growing number of open-source tools exist to mine social media and discussion sites, allowing targeting of online conversations surrounding desired topics,” (p.3). For example, TACIT is used “to target a range of real-time text sources (e.g., US Senate and Supreme Court speech transcriptions, Twitter, Reddit etc.), and to automatically apply corpus preprocessing and count routines.”

**Note:**

In addition to HathiTrust or BYU collections that are largely free text with their own proprietary analytic tools, there are also ad hoc tools that researchers can feed their own corpora to evaluate usage patterns. The simplest—and perhaps most widely used—of these tools are count algorithms, which scan texts for words in user-defined dictionaries, and return count lists, organized by dimensions of interest (such as 'personal pronouns' or 'emotion words') (e.g. **Word cloud**).

**My first experience with digital tools**

My first experience with digital tools for doing linguistics (i.e. Critical Discourse Analysis) was in Germany during my postdoc at the University of Freiburg in 2010. I was trained to do quantitative corpus linguistic analysis of media texts. My study was investigating the prevalence of the misrepresentation of the Niger Delta militia groups in the Nigerian press. To sustain my argument, I needed huge media data that showed frequently use of pejorative terms or labels such as “militants,” “terrorists,” “cultists,” “thieves” etc. and ideological bias that underlies their usage. My study would then, interpret and explain the data qualitatively on the implications of the negative

representations/ labelling of the ND militia groups for peace and security in Nigeria. For the first time, I was introduced to words such as “tagging”, “parsing”, “concordancing”, “keywording” etc. that required some processes of computation.

### Procedure

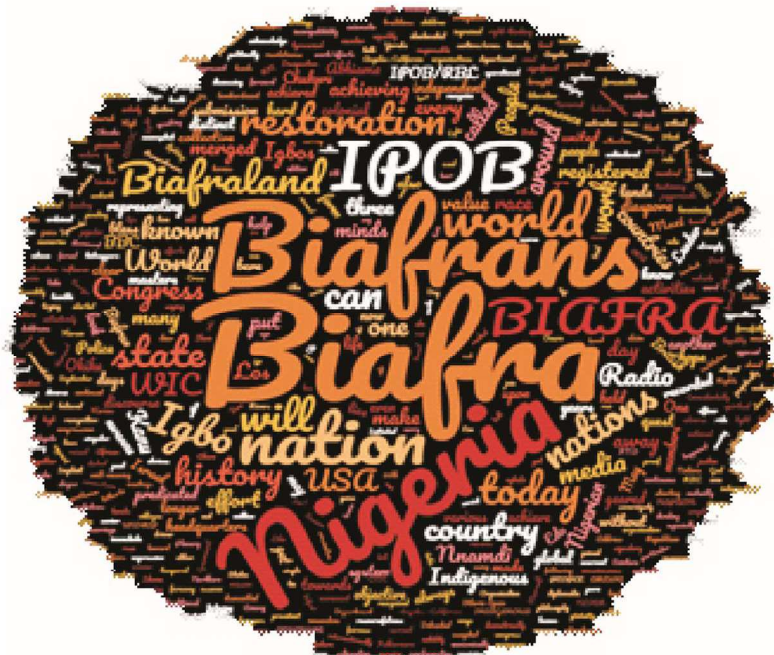
I compiled (manually) a plain (i.e. untagged) mini-corpus of 500,000 words from 12 Nigerian online newspapers (referred to as “Nigerian Media Corpus”, Chiluwa, 2011). My data was converted to computer-readable format (i.e. plain text) and fed into *Wordsmith Tools* (by Mike Scott). Through a concordance programme, I was able to evaluate lexical frequencies of search terms and group them in terms of their significance etc. Figure 2. is a screen shot of the concordance of the word “infidel,” using *Wordsmith*.

Fig. 2. Concordance of “infidel.”

N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	t. #	%	la. #	%	os. #	%	os. #	%	File	%
1	SEE THE INNOCENT PEOPLE THE INFIDEL GOVERNMENT IS KILLING	1,470	190	6%	0	1%	0	1%	0	1%	0	1%	search corpus.txt	34%
2	out...Aso rock is bombing down infidel politicians build it up with looted	1,567	203	7%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	search corpus.txt	36%
3	TAN IS NT UR FRIEND INFIDEL! BOKO HARAM	1,350	177	0%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	search corpus.txt	31%
4	2 Aug 11 @meifew213 INFIDEL YOU ARE ALREADY GUR	1,193	159	5%	0	5%	0	5%	0	5%	0	5%	search corpus.txt	27%
5	2 Aug 11 Imagine this infidel saying MEND has a legitimate	1,238	163	4%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	search corpus.txt	28%
6	ALONG. WE SUSPECTED THIS. THE INFIDEL IN ASO ROCK HAS NO CLUE.	1,703	214	3%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	search corpus.txt	39%
7	@DRDAMAGES. WE ASSUME HE IS INFIDEL AND HIS WORDS DONT	2,698	319	5%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	search corpus.txt	62%
8	of Sharia in Nigeria and ensure that the infidel does not go unpunished. 4) We	4,361	414	0%	0	2%	0	2%	0	2%	0	2%	search corpus.txt	93%
9	wonder how many years of bombing the infidel in aso rock can survive. We plead	2,498	289	7%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	search corpus.txt	57%
10	we conciliate & adjudicate wt decadent infidel pestiferous rulers of nig, we then r	1,781	221	8%	0	8%	0	8%	0	8%	0	8%	search corpus.txt	40%
11	26 Jul 11 REASON THE INFIDEL RULERS LIKE NIGERIA: IT IS	1,875	225	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	search corpus.txt	43%
12	We are in Boko Republic of Arewa. The infidel nig. govt and kafiri army should	1,156	156	3%	0	4%	0	4%	0	4%	0	4%	search corpus.txt	26%
13	?@BOKO_HARAMM If we tell the infidel govt to vote for Palestine and they	473	69	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	search corpus.txt	11%
14	nots k by and allow a gang rape. The infidel government of Nigeria has done	556	81	3%	0	2%	0	2%	0	2%	0	2%	search corpus.txt	13%
15	day of bombs...hope this is not an infidel song. BOKO HARAM	378	51	5%	0	8%	0	8%	0	8%	0	8%	search corpus.txt	9%
16	A drop of water we are firing Arewa and infidel Nigeria. Yarodan is ce nte BOKO	284	43	2%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	search corpus.txt	7%
17	bitch, Jesus in one sentence, you are infidel #ASSWIPE BOKO HARAM	312	46	6%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	search corpus.txt	7%
18	?@BOKO_HARAMM 17 Sep 11 INFIDEL OBJ DISTURBING THE PEACE	782	109	5%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	search corpus.txt	18%
19	Bad healthcare unleashed by Terrorist infidel Government did. BOKO HARAM	1,089	146	8%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	search corpus.txt	25%
20	we have been causing havoc and bad. Infidel federal government still clueless	1,108	149	5%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	search corpus.txt	25%
21	Obasanjo and Babangida (plus one infidel dunce in aso rock) taking 150	1,005	136	5%	0	1%	0	1%	0	1%	0	1%	search corpus.txt	23%
22	?@BOKO_HARAMM Wonder how that infidel sleeps at night. Oh we know.	902	124	3%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	search corpus.txt	21%
23	?@BOKO_HARAMM Heard the infidel goyim at Aso rock got him elf	920	128	7%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	search corpus.txt	21%

Today, scholars doing research in corpus linguistics appear to prefer *AntConc* (by Laurence Anthony), to do exactly the same thing *Wordsmith* would do (see Ruzaitė, J. 2018 “In search of hate speech in Lithuanian public discourse: A corpus-assisted analysis of online comments”). Interestingly “Word clouding” is another concept and software tool that can generate a word list, keywords, and possibly tag a text. A word cloud shows word frequencies - the most frequently used word appears the largest; the second most frequent is a bit smaller, the third most frequent appears a bit smaller than the second etc. Fig. 3 is word cloud from a recent study of hates speech produced by the Biafra campaign group, showing the most frequently used word in bold letters. The text is *Nnamdi Kanu's speech at the World Igbo Congress on September 06, 2015*.

Fig. 3 Word cloud of Kanu's campaign speech.



Source: wordclouds.com

### Methods and Tools

Recently, I attended a training on Data Analytics and Machine Learning that demonstrated the analysis of structured data, construction of models through algorithms, and being able to predict results. The software tools/applications used were KNIME and Orange. The study were market surveys that predicted consumer behaviour. Unfortunately, these methods were not adequate for analysing unstructured data, which happens to be my type of data in linguistic study. So, they were of no real use to linguistic or discourse analysis of unstructured text; what I needed to analyse the structure of hate speech on WhatsApp group political forums for example, was text mining and natural language processing.

**Methods/skills we need** (depending on the research questions)

- (1) Text-mining (processing of gleaned information from natural language texts (i.e. analysing text by extracting useful information for particular purposes;  
text is unstructured, amorphous, and difficult to deal with algorithmically)
- (2) Natural Language Processing (NLP) (a branch of AI (artificial intelligence) that helps computers understand and analyse large amounts of human

language. It draws from computer science and computational linguistics in order to fill the gap between human communication and computer understanding).

- (3) Social Network Analysis (SNA) (i.e. the mapping and measuring of relationships and flows between people, groups, organisations, computers, URLs, and other connected information/knowledge entities).

### **Applications/Software/Tools**

- (1) Word clouding (text analysis)
- (2) Python (programming language used by analysts, data scientists, programmers etc.)
- (3) Node XL (for SNA)
- (4) Text analytics and Sentiment Analysis Software (e.g. Confermit's text analytics software/OpenText Context Analytics) (useful to recognizing the expressions of negative (or positive) sentiment)

Several works in Linguistics and social media analysis apply mixed methods – the application of quantitative digital methods alongside qualitative methods of discourse analysis (e.g. CDA).

### **Research Projects in Digital Humanities**

Research literature in DH is already quite huge, as there are journals of digital humanities that give a great deal of insights to the role of digital technology in the humanity disciplines. I have selected a few of these works to illustrate my point:

#### **A. JOURNAL OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES**

1. *Modelling the Interpretation of Literary Allusion with Machine Learning Techniques* Coffee N. et al (2014), vol.3, no.1.

This research work is referred to as a “tesserae project.” Tesserae is a tool for detecting allusions in literary works. Hence, this study comprises “a large set of textual parallels, and then attempt to model which of these instances of text reuse are meaningful literary allusions and which are not, according to a group of human readers. While initial

attempts with a few basic textual features have proven surprisingly effective, here we employ a more complex feature set and machine learning techniques drawn from the field of computer vision in an attempt to improve the result...”



2. ***Making Digital: Visual Approaches to the Digital Humanities*** Beale N., Beale G., Dawson I. & Minkin L.

This study - known as “Making History Project,” – is an attempt by artists and archaeologists at the University of Southampton “to collaboratively develop innovative uses for 3D technologies. Techniques such as high-resolution data capture and 3D printing represent a new era in digital imaging. As these technologies become increasingly affordable they are coming to play a more significant role in archaeological and artistic practice. Both art and archaeology are currently involved in attempting to realise the full implications and potential of these technologies.

#### B. DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE HUMANITIES (Oxford Academic)

1. **Enabling complex analysis of large-scale digital collections: humanities research, high-performance computing, and transforming access to British Library digital collections**  
**Terras M. et al**(Volume 33, Issue 2, 1 June 2018, p. 456–466)

This study was a pilot project at the University College London in collaboration with the British Library to show how the application of computer technology can be used to facilitate the needs of researchers in the humanities. Using institutional data-processing frameworks used to support scientific research, 60,000 digitized books were analysed... This research identified infrastructural and procedural barriers and made recommendations on resource allocation to best support non-computational researchers in undertaking 'big data' research. It was recommended that research software engineer capacity could be most efficiently deployed in maintaining and supporting data sets, while librarians could provide an essential service in running initial, routine queries for humanities scholars.

2. **An authorship analysis of the Jack the Ripper letters** Andrea Nini  
(Vol.33, Issue 3, 1 September 2018, p. 621–636)

This study attempts to clear the controversy surrounding the legendary murderer “Jack the Ripper” and the over 200 letters that were attributed to him. “The most supported theory on the authorship of these letters is that some of the earliest key texts were written by journalists to sell more newspapers and that the same person is responsible for writing the two most iconic earliest letters. The present article reports on an authorship clustering/verification analysis of the Jack the Ripper letters with a view to detect the presence of one writer for the earliest and most historically important texts.” After compiling the 'Jack the Ripper Corpus' consisting of the 209 letters linked to the case, a cluster analysis of the letters is carried out using the Jaccard distance of word 2-grams. The quantitative results and the discovery of certain shared distinctive lexicogrammatical structures support the hypothesis that the two most iconic texts responsible for the creation of the persona of Jack the Ripper were written by the same person. In

addition, there is also evidence that a link exists between these texts and another of the key texts in the case, the Moab and Midian letter.”

## LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC COMPUTING

### 3. Longitudinal detection of dementia through lexical and syntactic changes in writing: a case study of three British novelists

Xuan Le lan, Lancashire Graeme Hirst, Regina Jokel (Vol.26, Issue 4, 1 December 2011, p.435-461)

This is “a large-scale longitudinal study of lexical and syntactic changes in language in Alzheimer's disease using complete, fully parsed texts and a large number of measures...” The results support the hypothesis that signs of dementia can be found in diachronic analyses of patients' writings, and in addition lead to new understanding of the work of the individual authors being studied.

### 4. The Corpus of Contemporary American English as the first reliable monitor corpus of English

Mark Davies (Vol.25, Issue 4, 1 December 2010, p.447-

“The Corpus of Contemporary American English is the first large, genre-balanced corpus of any language, which has been designed and constructed from the ground up as a 'monitor corpus', and which can be used to accurately track and study recent changes in the language. The 400 million words corpus is evenly divided between spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. Most importantly, the genre balance stays almost exactly the same from year to year, which allows it to accurately model changes in the 'real world'. After discussing the corpus design, we provide a number of concrete examples of how the corpus can be used to look at recent changes in English, including morphology (new suffixes *-friendly* and *-gate*), syntax (including prescriptive rules, quotative *like, so not* ADJ, the *get* passive, resultatives, and verb complementation), semantics (such as changes in meaning with *web, green, or gay*), and lexis—including word and phrase frequency by year, and using the corpus architecture to produce lists of all words that have had large shifts in frequency between specific historical periods.”

## Critical Discourse in Digital Humanities

Gibbs (2011) asked a very important question: “where is the criticism in the digital humanities? Then he argued:

- (i) **Digital humanists have not created an effective critical discourse around their work;**
- (ii) **We need more theoretical and practical rubrics for evaluating digital humanities work;**
- (iii) **Digital humanities work requires a different kind of peer review to produce effective criticism.**

The argument here is that there is an aesthetic or rhetoric uniqueness of the (analog) humanities (even before digital humanities). For instance, philosophy texts sound different from history texts, which sound different from literary texts; hence, critical discourse must be based on collaborative and community-mediated peer review.

“...As much as we champion cross-disciplinary work, there is an inherent unease to it, in no small part because it becomes more difficult to evaluate it. Given a particular piece of scholarship: How should one read it? Which criteria should be applied?” He further argues:

“Digital humanities projects are not art...and therefore may appear to have considerably less need for criticism, as opposed to simple peer review...A critical discourse of digital humanities work: (1) must be concerned with both interpretation and evaluation; (2) is central to establishing the importance of the kind of scholarly and even cultural work that it does. On the whole, a critical discourse will provide crucial services for an interested audience: establish utility and value, question blemishes and flaws, and identifies sources, commonalities, and missed opportunities.”

### **Conclusion**

Digital humanities is new in Nigeria, probably because those of us that rely on online data for the kind of research we do are very few. But since we can no longer deny the impact of digital media and the role of digital technology as research tools, we must now understand the extent of knowledge and skills we need to “do” digital humanities.

I recommend the following:

- Greater Interest in DH as an academic discipline. Can we introduce taught

courses in digital humanities in our Departments?

- Collaborative interdisciplinary projects, especially with our colleagues in ICT and computer science without compromising our “humanities” identity.
- Participating in free online courses in data analytics, data mining, text-mining and NLP, or consciously/deliberately pursue training for technical skills in quantitative data analysis with new methods and approaches.

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