INFERENCES AND BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS AS KEY TO MEANING INTERPRETATION IN *SIDE ATTRACTION* (A NIGERIAN FILM)

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is a pragmatic study of the role of inferences and assumed background knowledge in the interpretation of meaning in Side Attraction (a Nigerian film produced by Franca Brown). The study revealed a considerable reliance on conversational implicatures, presuppositions, entailment and other background assumptions in the advancement of the message of the film. In conversations (including the dialogues in films), if speakers and listeners (or viewers) do not share the same cultural values and background knowledge, wrong inferences could be made from utterances. The inferential gaps remain unfilled or partially so. This could affect meaning interpretation. This study has attempted to draw from the cultural context of the film to explicate pragmatically the utterances which trigger the inferences. The aim is to enhance the understanding of the film by foreigners who form part of the film's target audience on YouTube and other international media.*

KEYWORDS: Film Discourse, Pragmatic Inferences, Semantic Meaning, Cultural Meaning

INTRODUCTION

Meaning has always occupied the interest of mankind because language is as old as mankind itself. Ancient Greek philosophers made meaning an object of study which eventually shifted interest to the examination of language as a veritable means through which meaning is conveyed. In this paper, the focus is on how pragmatic meaning is conveyed in the Nollywood (a term used for Nigerian film industry) film captioned *Side Attraction* produced by Franca Brown (2009). A casual search of Nollywood films on You Tube brought the film to the attention of this researcher. The idea that this film could be accessed by any person anywhere in the world (being available on You Tube) got this researcher wondering how many viewers from other diverse parts of the globe with their distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds could interpret the message of the film effectively and understand the various cultural and contextual nuances of meaning in it. This informed the need to do a pragmatic study of the film. Inference plays a great role in attaining a speaker's intended meaning which is not exactly a mapping of the linguistic form used in expressing such meaning. To arrive at the speaker's meaning, some form of inferencing is done and this is possible when both the speaker and the hearer share common background knowledge and similar presuppositions. Thus, they can assign the same meaning to particular linguistic forms.

The objectives of this study are therefore as follows: (i) to identify some of the utterances in the film discourse which require pragmatic inference for their interpretation; (ii) to trace and explicate as much as possible the contextual roots of such utterances within the limit of the researcher's background knowledge.

This study is limited to examination of meaning which derive from pragmatic inferences in the film *Side Attraction*. The significance of this study is to attempt to make available some form

of background information which can help people who do not share the presumptions of the speakers in the film to have a better understanding of it.

THEORY

Pragmatics

Pragmatics forms the theoretical basis for this study. The definition of pragmatics has been controversial as it seems to share boundaries with semantics and sociolinguistics. Levinson (1983) examines a number of possible definitions of pragmatics but sees loopholes in them. He concludes: "The most promising are the definitions that equate pragmatics with 'meaning minus semantics', or with a theory of language understanding that takes context into account, in order to complement the contribution that semantics makes to meaning" (p. 32). By "meaning minus semantics" he means that pragmatics handles other aspects of the study of meaning that are not covered by semantics.   In differentiating pragmatics from semantics, Levinson sees semantics as being concerned with 'sentence-meaning', whereas pragmatics is about 'utterance-meaning'. A sentence is seen as an "abstract theoretical entity defined within a theory of grammar, while an utterance is the issuance of a sentence, a sentence-analogue, or sentence fragment, in an actual context" (p. 18). Semantics is related to competence whereas pragmatics is equated with performance. On his part, Mey (1993, p. 6) looks at pragmatics from the angle of communication in society and defines it thus: "Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society". This is the meeting point between pragmatics and sociolinguistics as both of them are concerned with society. Pragmatics examines how shared beliefs and assumptions affect meaning interpretation in a society whereas sociolinguistics tries to understand how the structure of a society is reflected in its language. According to Gumperz (1971, p. 223, quoted in Wardhaugh 1986, p. 11), "… sociolinguistics is an attempt to find correlations between social structure and linguistic structure and to observe any changes that occur".

Grice's meaning-nn and conversational implicature

The philosopher, H. P. Grice, made a remarkable contribution to pragmatics with his theory of meaning where he tried to differentiate between **natural meaning** and **non-natural meaning**. According to him, natural meaning is the kind of conventional meaning as in the sentence "Those black clouds mean rain". Of more importance to pragmatics is his notion of non-natural meaning (which he also called "meaning-nn"). This is meaning intentionally communicated by a speaker in an utterance. He defines meaning-nn thus:

> (1)   S meant-nn z by uttering U if and only if:
> (i) S intended U to cause some effect z in recipient H
> (ii) S intended (i) to be achieved simply by H recognizing that intention (i)
>   [Grice 1957, as quoted in Levinson 1983, p. 16]

S stands for the speaker; z stands for what the speaker meant the hearer to understand by his utterance; U stands for the utterance made by the speaker which may be a word, phrase, sentence or a string of sentences; and H is the hearer. What Grice means is that meaning (i.e. non-natural meaning) is achieved when a speaker makes an utterance and the hearer is able to understand his intention by recognizing the effect the speaker intends the utterance to have on the hearer. This meaning is achieved because the hearer shares a mutual knowledge with the

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speaker and both of them recognize that such utterance is meant to achieve the effect intended by the speaker.

There may be a difference between speaker-meaning (meaning-nn) and sentence-meaning. The speaker may mean something different from what he says, as in irony. To bridge the gap between speaker-meaning and sentence-meaning, Grice in his second theory of meaning came up with his concept of **conversational implicature (**in his William James lecture of 1967 but published in 1975). In conversational implicature, a distinction is drawn between what an utterance says and what the speaker implicates by the utterance. The speaker can mean more than what is actually said. Take for instance the following:

> (2)   Obi: Let's meet at school tomorrow
> Ada: Tomorrow is public holiday

Ada's utterance above is not a direct answer to Obi's proposal. It is only by inference that her intended meaning can be conveyed to Obi. It is a shared knowledge between Ada and Obi that on public holiday there is no school. Therefore, by implication, they cannot meet on the day Obi proposed.

In order to explain the discrepancy between utterance meaning and speaker's implicated meaning, Grice came up with his **Co-operative Principles** (abbreviated to CP)**.** There are four sub-principles or "maxims", as he called them, and they are as follows:

The maxim of quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as required;
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than required.

The maxim of quality:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The maxim of relation:

1. Make your contribution relevant.

The maxim of manners:

Be perspicuous, and specifically:

1. Avoid obscurity
2. Avoid ambiguity
3. Be brief
4. Be orderly.

Grice brought these four maxims under one Cooperative Principle:

> Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.
> (Grice 1975, p. 47, as quoted in Mey 1993, p. 72)

These are guidelines to participants in a conversation to ensure meaningful communication. However, some linguists have criticized these principles as being vague and meant for the descriptive function of language to convey propositional information. Not much of social and expressive functions of language are addressed by these principles. For instance, for the sake of politeness and the feeling of others some of the maxims may be violated (Lyons 1977). Some of the Neo-Gricean linguists have proposed some modifications to make the maxims more effective and less redundant. Chief among these are L. R. Horn; S. C. Levinson; D. Sperber and D. Wilson (as quoted in Jaszezolt 2010 and Carston 2005).

In spite of everything, the benefits of these Cooperative Principles are immense in accounting for certain linguistic phenomena. The first is that these principles help to account for the relevance of such utterances as Ada's response in (2) above. Her response violates the maxims of Relation and Quantity. A more relevant and informative response would have been "No, we can't meet tomorrow because it is public holiday and schools do not open on public holiday." However, inference is made by the hearer based on the common background knowledge shared with the speaker to arrive at the implicatum of the utterance. Obi would believe that Ada was obeying the Cooperative Principle and would then try to work out the relevance of such seemingly irrelevant response by making the necessary inferences. He would then arrive at the suggestion: If tomorrow is public holiday, then there will be no school, and therefore we cannot meet at school. As pointed out by Levinson (1983, p. 102) "inferences arise to preserve the assumption of co-operation". These pragmatic inferences are what Grice called conversational implicature.

Another kind of pragmatic implicature is where a speaker deliberately flouts the Co-operatve Principle to exploit it for some communicative purposes. This is the case with ironies, metaphors and some other figures of speech (tropes). The conversation in (2) above could be such that Ada considers Obi's attention unwanted and she gives the following response:

> (3) Obi: Let's meet at school tomorrow
>   Ada: No, we'd rather meet in your bedroom tonight

In (3), Obi will instantly know that Ada's response is not in line with the state of affairs between them based on his understanding of reality. He will know that her response does not reflect her attitude towards him so far and therefore false. Then by inference he will find an explanation for such a response: *she does not want to meet me at all*. In this case, the semantic content of her utterance (the literal meaning) is at variance with her intended meaning (the figurative meaning/irony).

Presupposition and entailment

Two other pragmatic inferences are presupposition and entailment. They differ from conversational implicature because their inference is semantic. The inferential trigger is tied to something in the meaning of the utterance used. The inference of conversational implicature is based on some assumptions that are outside the linguistic structure of the utterance. Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2001, p. 401) define the pragmatic preposition of a sentence as "the set of conditions that have to be satisfied in order for the intended speech act to be appropriate in the circumstances, or to be felicitous". An example of presupposition they give is:

> (4)   a. John accused Harry of writing the letter.

> b. John did not accuse John of writing the letter.
> c. There was something blameworthy about writing the letter.

The presupposition-trigger here is the *verb of judging* "accuse" (Fillmore 1971, cited in Levinson 1983, p. 182). One characteristic feature of presupposition is that it remains constant under negation. The negation of (4a) in (4b) does not remove the presupposition: *that there was something blameworthy about writing the letter*.

Entailment is the logical relationship between two sentences whereby every situation that makes one sentence true or false makes the other true or false. An example of entailment is the following:

> (5)   a. Emeka is married.
>   b. Emeka is not a bachelor.

Sentence (5a) entails sentence (5b). If (5a) is true, (5b) is equally true, and vice versa. The same applies to the falsity of (5a). Entailment does not survive negation.

To sum up, the pragmatic inferences realized in conversational implicature, presuppositions and entailment are assumptions which participants make in communication based on assumed common knowledge about the situation of utterance. Such assumptions can affect meaning interpretation if they are not shared by both the speaker and hearer. In relation to the present study, some of the utterances made by the characters in the film have to be examined based on the foregoing pragmatic theories of inference and their possible perception by a non-Nigerian target audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistic study of films is a relatively unexplored area of research. Film study by scholars over the years has favoured the visual aspects (the cinematographic techniques) rather than the linguistic aspects. Dynel (2011) raised issues surrounding film discourse research. The source noted a number of dichotomies between real life conversation and film discourse: "spontaneity vs. meticulous preparation, permanence vs. ephemeral nature, or the speaker's intentional communication vs. the speaker's reproduction of words" (p. 43). This is the reason why some form of controversy surrounds the use of film discourse for linguistic analysis which seeks to reflect everyday conversational language. Such researchers who doubt the applicability of film discourse to linguistic study maintain that it is not empirical because it has been "scripted, written and rewritten, censored, polished, rehearsed, and performed" (Kozloff 2000, p. 18, quoted in Dynel 2011, p. 43).

On the other hand, some other linguists who support the viability of film discourse in linguistic research hold the view that 'film discourse set in contemporary times should mirror language users' everyday communicative patterns, evoking an illusion of reallife conversations, and subscribing to the so-called "reality code" or "cultural realism"' (Dynel 2011, p. 43). The source goes further to argue that the scriptwriter and other members of the crew in a film discourse ensure that characters' verbalizations resemble realistic language use and are guided by the principles and conventions underlying everyday language use. The "naturalness" of film discourse is proved by the fact that some theoretical models in language study are validated using film discourse. The source, however, cautions:

> in fairness to critics who harbour doubts as regards the comparability between film discourse and everyday language, a provision must be made that research questions need to be chosen with care. Irrespective of the points of resemblance they share with everyday talk, verbal interactions in films (representing a variety of genres) may display features which will not normally be found in the former, at least not to the same degree.

(Dynel 2011, p. 45)

Androutsopoulos (2012), in the introduction he wrote for a special edition of the journal *Multilingua 31*, is of the view that cinematic discourse should not be studied as an evidence of everyday language but as a legitimate area of sociolinguistic inquiry. He maintains that cinematic discourse does not reflect everyday language. To him, sociolinguistic interest in film studies need not be a check to see "whether the fictional representation of linguistic variability is 'in fact real'" (p. 145). The focus should rather be on how sociolinguistic variations are exploited by film producers and the rest of the crew in the meaning-making process. This is the character-based approach of the papers in the Multilingua 31 special issue:

> […] a character-based approach assumes that linguistic choices in cinematic discourse become meaningful through their assignment to particular characters and their deployment in dialogic contrasts against the backdrop of (dominant) language ideologies (Androutsopoulos 2012, p. 147).

Thus social categories are sustained in cinematic discourse through characterization and stereotypes. This is achieved by the linguistic choices made by film producers. In fact, it was Lippi-Green (1997, cited in Androutsopoulos 2012, Abecassis 2010) who drew attention to the use of language to create stereotypes in Hollywood to sustain a predetermined image of ethnic minorities. (Also see Bleichchenbacher 2008 (cited in Abecassis 2010); Bulcholtz (2007); Mouka, Saridakis & Fotopoulou 2015). Trowell (2007) also studied Lippi-Green's claim that animated films not only entertain, but are also a way to teach children to associate specific characteristics and lifestyles with specific social groups through language variations identifiable with such groups.

Nigerian films have also received linguistic interest in the literature. Studies of these films tend to centre on how the language of the films reflects the sociolinguistic realities of English in Nigeria where it has the status of a second language in this multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nation. Researches focus on how the film discourse here reflects the everyday language of the local context. Such studies reveal the prevalence of the features which characterize the Nigerian variety of English: linguistic interference from the mother tongue and pidgin; semantic shift; grammatical, morphological, semantic and phonological errors; nativization; borrowing; code-mixing, code-switching, etc. Pragmatic aspects of the films also come under examination, especially as regards speech acts and politeness. The thematic aspects of the films are studied too. [cf. Ezejideaku & Ugwu 2009; Essan 2008; Onyrionwu 2007; Akpabio 2007; Dippio 2007; Ogu 2011].

In conclusion, the studies so far reviewed on Nigerian films by this researcher have adopted a speaker-based approach in their study. Attention seems to be on what linguistic strategies the speaker adopts in the peculiar socio-cultural and linguistic context he finds himself. The present study has adopted a reverse perspective (a hearer-based approach) by trying to see how the

meanings generated by the speaker's strategies could possibly be perceived by the hearer in another context possibly different from the speaker's. This is the gap this research seeks to fill.

Therefore, the approach adopted in this study is one which views film discourse as being an avenue where film producers try to recreate the socio-cultural realities of their environment to express their unique visions as creative artists. To tell their story, they utilize materials around them and tell the story in a language natural to them. To create an illusion of reality, the producers try to put in the mouths of the actors everyday language that portrays the characters they create. However, as cautioned by scholars (e.g. Dynel 2011, Androutsopoulos 2012), film discourse may not be exactly the same as everyday language because producers may slant film discourse to suit their message. Nevertheless, whether the language reflects everyday language or not, the focus of this study is not affected. It looks at the language of the film *Side Attraction* on its own right as a means of communicating the producers' message to the targeted recipients. This study presumes that the utterances of the characters elicit inferences which interpretations require a fallback on the socio-cultural context of the film.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative. The data for the study was obtained by a transcription (i.e. from audio/visual to written form) of the conversation of the characters in the film *Side Attraction* produced by Franca Brown. To capture the multimodal nature of the data, a little descriptive information is supplied to give the necessary context of each utterance situation. The time slot in the film of each transcribed data is indicated in terms of second, minute and hour e.g. [01:23:15]. This means that the utterance is located at the time position indicated thus: one hour, twenty-three minutes and fifteen seconds. With this it is easy to verify the data by moving the time marker on the DVD to the desired time slot. The criterion for selecting the particular utterances and dialogues used for the study is the perceived level of inferencing involved in the interpretation of meaning, especially pertaining to the socio-cultural background of the film.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

Preamble

The position taken here is to trace the inferential paths of these utterances in the data to explicate their meanings with reference to what the speakers have taken for granted. It is the presumption of this researcher that any utterance which heavily relies on the speaker's cultural context to fill the inferential gap may be difficult for the recipient to interpret and understand fully if such a recipient does not share the assumed background knowledge based on which the speaker made the utterance. Appel and Muysken (1987, p. 145) in identifying problems and misunderstandings in native-non-native interaction write:

> A third source of problems in native-non-native interaction lies in the fact that *the cultural presuppositions of the two interlocutors are not the* same (emphasis is by the authors). The meaning of utterances is not only determined by their semantic content (and syntactic structure), but also by presuppositions accompanying the utterance.

Ping (1999) also identifies cultural presuppositions as one of the causes of misreading in translation: "Misreadings in translation are often caused by the presuppositions the translator harbors about the reality of the source language community. These presuppositions are usually culturally derived and deserve the special attention of the translator". The data have been organized as follows: a summary of the film's plot/theme, the notion of marriage, religious belief, and other peculiar contextual phenomena.

Summary of the plot/theme of the film

The film *Side Attraction* is centred on the protagonist, Winnie Dokubo, and her friend, Gloria Maduka. Winnie is married to Tony Dokubo, a well-to-do business man, and they have two children, Boma (a girl) and Pere (a boy). Winnie runs a supermarket business financed by her husband. Gloria is married to Chief Maduka, a wealthy man. The story revolves around the love escapades of these men and how their wives react to them. Tony cheats on his wife on every opportunity he gets. At the beginning of the film, we see him seduce Susan, a "school daughter" of his wife who came on a visit. He uses money to lure her to sleep with him. However, the domestic servant, Eno, barges into the guest's room (where Susan stays) and interrupts the love making that is about taking place. At another time, Winnie catches him romancing a woman in his office. He also impregnates Eno, their domestic servant, as he did to the previous one. On the other hand, Winnie resists the advances of Richard, a very handsome and wealthy young man who fell for her when he met her at a supermarket. He had courted a woman who died when they were about to get married. For six years he has refused taking another woman because, according to him, he has not seen another woman like Stella, the late fiancée. He sees in Winnie what he wants.

On the part of Gloria, her husband married a second wife after fifteen years of marriage, shattering her sense of love and security. Then recently he has taken a third wife. He hardly gives love and attention to Gloria and even the second wife. Gloria finds a lover for herself, Philip, a young man whom she uses the money given to her by her husband to maintain. Gloria tries to justify her action based on her husband's actions. Winnie tries to make Gloria see that her affair with Philip is not the right approach to Chief's infidelity to her. According to Winnie, two wrongs cannot make a right.

Eventually, Chief catches Gloria and Philip making love in the house where he kept Gloria and her children. In the quarrel that ensures after Philip had run away, Chief collapses and dies of a cardiac arrest when he wants to beat Gloria. Gloria absconds afterwards and stands to lose her husband's property to her co-wives. Meanwhile following the visit by Winnie's mother and her tactful unraveling of the fact that Tony is the one that impregnated Eno and the previous servant, she convinces Tony to abandon his irresponsible life. Richard also gives up on Winnie and she recommends her younger unmarried sister to him.

In all, the producer, by the message of the film, stoutly defends the sanctity of marriage and does not think that any reason is enough to accommodate infidelity.

The notion of marriage

The semantic concept >marriage< is something in the cognition of every human society. It has the literal meaning "two people who are married to each other" (Advanced English Dictionary), and the word *married* means "having a husband or wife" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). However, as a society's cultural institution, different societies may

have different perception and norms about the marriage institution. Löbner (2002), in discussing meaning and cognition, draws a line between concept and category. A concept is our mental representation of a category. Before we can store something in our mind, we must first classify it as one of the categories of our experiential reality. As Barsalou (cited in Löbner 2002, p.173) writes: "After a perceptual system acquires information about an entity in the environment, the cognitive system places the entity into a category". So when we encounter the word *marriage*, our cognitive system places it in the category MARRIAGE. Before placing it, it must be recognized as the semantic concept >marriage< which is its interpretation in our mind, that is, the meaning of the word. However, word meanings are not exactly the same as our concepts for actual categories. The concept every individual has about every category depends on his individual knowledge of the category and personal experience. Such knowledge is his cultural category of the concept. This is the case with the semantic concept >marriage< which every individual categorizes according to his personal experience and cultural knowledge. It is from such knowledge that he can draw his inference.

In our data, speakers' utterances about marriage is assumed to reflect such assumptions they have about the concept >marriage< based on their categorization of it in their cognitive system. Here are examples of such utterances:

(6) SITUATION: Tony cannot resist the sight of Susan sleeping on the couch in the sitting room. He sits beside her and caresses her legs which woke her up confounded. Tony is the husband of her friend, Winnie, whom she has visited.

Susan:	<u>Hello, this is Susan and **not Winnie!**</u>
Tony:	Sussie, come on, don't I know that? Look, I've always had you in my mind. Ever since I knew that you were coming here, I was so excited that I was going to be with you again.
Susan:	<u>Excuse me, I'm your **wife's friend**.</u>
Tony:	School daughter, you mean. So what? Look, I've always loved you ever before I married Winnie.

[Time: 0:12:43]

(7) SITUATION: Richard gets charmed by Winnie when he meets her for the first time in a supermarket. He warms his way into her company, paying her bills and carrying her shopping to her car. She thanks him and is about to drive off. Richard offers her his complimentary card.

Richard:	Well, here's my card. Can I see you again?
Winnie:	<u>Richard, I'm **married.**</u>
Richard:	It's okay. I mean, I'll still like to see you again. I have a whole lot of issues I'll like you to advise me on. Don't say no. I just want to be your friend, that's all. [Time: 0:15:43]

There are two kinds of highlight used in the data. The underlining identifies the utterance which proposition has the underlying assumption of the speaker. Then the utterance part written in boldface signifies the trigger of the inference.

In the two extracts above, the underlying assumption of the speakers of the utterances is that, based on their cultural knowledge of the category MARRIAGE, no man or woman has the right to caress or be in close sexual relationship with one except the person is one's spouse. In extract (6), Susan's utterance *Hello, this is Susan and not Winnie!* exhibits a flouting of the maxims of

Relevance and Manner. First, her uttering the social expression *Hello* which has an interpersonal phatic meaning is not appropriate in the context. Susan has no reason to say *hello* given her shock to notice that Tony was romancing her. It is this inappropriateness which forces the recipient (the viewer) to do the required inference to arrive at the meaning of this *hello* which is similar to "Are you sure of what you are doing?" This is what is implicated by her utterance. This meaning is supported by her gesture and voice in the film. The other part of Susan's utterance *This is Susan and not Winnie*! is not just performing an ostensive function. Susan knows that Tony recognizes that she is not Winnie. She is not pointing out to Tony that she is not Winnie. By her utterance she is implicating: *You are a married man and your wife is Winnie. I, Susan, am not your wife so you should not caress me*. Tony tries to wave aside her intended meaning by responding to the literal meaning of the utterance: *Sussie, come on, don't I know that*? Understanding the awkwardness of his action, he goes on to offer an excuse which is the love he has had for her long before now. Such a profession of love rather makes the situation more awkward given the cultural background knowledge they both have for the concept >marriage<. This is expressed in Susan's next utterance *Excuse me, I'm your wife's friend.* Like the first, this too violates the maxims of Relevance and Quantity. Susan is implicating that Tony should not direct such love professions to her. Tony is not only a married man but is also married to her friend. An affair with him should be unheard of. Tony understands the force of her utterance and tries an evading strategy: *School daughter, you mean. So what?*

In (7), Winnie's utterance *Richard, I'm married* entails: she has a husband. The utterance also violates the same maxims of Relevance and Quantity. It does not directly answer Richard's question and does not supply enough information as answer to his question. Through implicature though, Richard is able to establish the relevance of her response and is able to get the full information: *I cannot take your card and accept to see you again because I know that your reason is that you want an affair with me. I cannot have an affair with you because I am married. Being married, as I understand it in my cultural context, means that I cannot have an affair with another man.* Just like Tony, Richard understands the awkwardness of the suggestion of his utterance and seeks a mitigation of its perlocutionary effect. He tells her that he only wants to be mere friends with her which he knows is a lie.

Relating the foregoing to the focus of this research, what inference can be drawn from the utterances in (6) and (7) by a person who may not share the inferential assumptions of the speakers? Going by the Prototype Theory (see Löbner 2002), the category MARRIAGE is a prototype and an abstract conception. It has graded membership. Some exemplars of MARRIAGE may not represent this abstract prototype very well. It all depends on the cultural context of the individual. In some cultures, the notion of marriage does not demand such stringent measures. The producer's notion of marriage may be at variance with the individual viewer's. Some might ask: what is the big deal about having an extra-marital affair, especially when your partner is not even faithful? The full weight of Susan's utterances and Winnie's too depends on the recipient's notion of what the norms of the marriage institution are, as provided in his culture and his personal knowledge.

Another kind of utterance which relies on the cultural context for interpretation is the example in (8) below.

(8) SITUATION: Winnie was invited by her friend Gloria to her house. As they sit by the pool side, Gloria's young lover, Philip, comes in with Richard. Philip kisses and

romances Gloria before going inside with Richard to change to swimming trunks. Winnie expresses shock at Gloria's affair with Philip.

Winnie: Gloria, this is too close for comfort. What will Chief say if he finds him here?

Gloria: Oh Chief (laughs), he has had his own fun with me. <u>Right now he is in the hands of his **third wife**</u>.

Winnie: E-e? But it's still not right. Two wrongs cannot make a right. Never.

[Time: 1:11:30]

The linguistic expression *third wife* is highly significant. It is a contradiction of the semantic concept>marriage< which prototypically specifies a union between a man and a woman who now become a couple. Different cultures have varying exemplars of this prototype. Even within a culture, different exemplars begin to emerge with time. Given the upsurge in homosexual relationships and the increasing boldness of the practitioners of this unusual sexual relationship, marriage is being redefined to accommodate this absurdity. In Africa, polygamous marriage is a culturally-based marriage practice. It is the source of this lexicon *third wife*. Here a man has more than one wife at a time. Some cultures practice polyandry where a woman marries more than one husband simultaneously. The actual implications of these unusual relationships can only be fully understood by one who lives within the cultural context of their practice.

In (9) and (10) below, language is used to sustain a prevalent cultural attitude towards women as it concerns infidelity in marriage.

(9) SITUATION: Chief is passing by when he decides to stop at Gloria's house. It is his house where he keeps Gloria and her children, being a polygamist. Philip, Gloria's lover, visited and is lying on top of Gloria fondling her with his shirt off when Chief comes in to see them. Philip flees and Chief turns to Gloria who has told him that Philip was only helping him since he abandoned her.

Chief: Why didn't you ask for a divorce?

Gloria: Mm?

Chief: Yes. Why didn't you? Rather than doing this in my house!<u> Gloria, you are **a disgrace to womanhood**! This is **a taboo**</u>!

Gloria: Oh, you call what I have done a taboo?

Chief: Yes.

Gloria: What about yours? You have committed a sacrilege and you know it. Look, for fifteen years I was faithful to you. What did you pay me with? You went and married a girl of your daughter's age as a third wife.

Chief: My God! She's not even sorry for her action!

[Time: 2:49:34]

(10) SITUATION: Tony has just broken to Winnie the news of the death of Chief who died of a heart attack when he caught Gloria and Philip. In his bid to beat Gloria in their hot exchanges, he slumped and died.

Tony: Well, they say <u>Chief **caught** Gloria **in bed** with a small boy</u> so he developed a cardiac arrest and died of a heart attack.

Winnie: God! <u>Gloria **caught in bed** with a small boy</u>! Hei! Jesus!

Tony: I never knew that woman was so **irresponsible**. Look, I beg you in the name of God, sweetheart, please I want you to severe every relationship you have with that woman, okay? She's **a bad influence**.

[Time: 3:00:03]

What we have in (9) and (10) is similar to the approach in sociolinguistic study of films where linguistic choices reflect dominant language ideology by creating character stereotypes. Here we have the sustenance of a long-held cultural ideology about what roles are expected of the sexes. According to Shrikhande (2003, p. 11, cited in Pilar 2012, p. 105):

> …gender stereotypes are created on the basis of binary oppositions between the actions, roles and responsibilities conventionally attributed to men and women. While men have traditionally adopted the role of businessman and breadwinner of the family, for centuries women have been stereotypically portrayed according to four distinct characteristics:

1) A woman's place is in the home;
2) Women do not make important decisions or do important things;
3) Women are dependent and need men's protection;
4) Men regard women primarily as sexual objects and are not interested in women as people.

There seems to be different parameters to assess the behavior of the various sexes when it comes to sex and marriage. The message of the producer of this film is clear: infidelity in marriage by both the man and woman is bad; however, according to how the prevalent culture in Nigeria holds it, a woman's infidelity is more severely viewed than that of a man. The fact that the culture permits polygamy is an indication that the Nigerian society does not view a man's extra-marital affair the same way as a woman's.

In looking at the linguistic choices made by the producer of this film and how these contribute in building a certain image, we will look at the Appraisal Theory (see Mouka, Saridakis & Fotopoulou 2015) as our framework.

> The appraisal framework has been widely used in Sentiment Analysis to identify subjective information, emotions and opinions, as manifest in discourse […] and to classify the attitude of speakers/writers […].
>
> The three sub-components of Appraisal (theory) are *attitude, graduation* and *engagement. Attitude* is concerned with affect, judgment and appreciation and has a polarity, i.e., a positive or a negative dimension. *Engagement* deals with the positioning of the speaker towards the evaluation and concerns the rhetorical devices that are used to vary the engagement of speakers with their utterances (*I believe…, it is rumoured that…, X said….*). *Graduation* concerns grading phenomena and adjusting the degree of evaluations (e.g., in the grading between competent player, good player, brilliant player or contentedly, happily, joyously, ecstatically. Moreover, graduation is applicable also to indicators of engagement. A bare assertion does not have the same intensity as an utterance that is introduced with a modal value, such as *possibly* or *certainly* or presented as a hypothesis…. (Mouka, Saridakis & Fotopoulou 2015, p.39).

The attitude sub-component has three aspects: *affect*, *appreciation* and *judgment. Affect* concerns expression of emotions, especially negative emotions to other people such as hatred and anger emanating from racial/ethnic/religious differences, e.g. *What the hell are those niggers doing out there?* (*Monster's Ball*). *Appreciation* is evaluation of other people's characteristics in such things as colour, ethnicity, religion physical characteristics, etc., especially when these are considered "negative markers of difference", e.g. *How come niggers are so stupid?* (*Do the Right Thing). Judgment* has to do with evaluating other people's behavior positively or negatively, e.g. *One in every three black males is in some phase of the correctional system. Is that a coincidence or do these people have like a racial commitment to crime*? (*American History X*) (for the given examples and all other citations above see Mouka, Saridakis & Fotopoulou 2015, p.51-52).

In (9) and (10), language is manipulated to sustain the message of the film and to uphold the traditional view on fidelity in marriage in the Nigerian context with the producer, either deliberately or inadvertently, conforming to current language-ideology views in cinematic discourse. In (9), Chief's outburst "Gloria, you are a disgrace to womanhood! This is **a taboo**!" can be classified under the affect and judgment sub-components of attitude. The lexical triggers *a disgrace to womanhood* and *taboo* ignite the necessary inferences to be made and also express the negative attitude implicit in the utterances. Chief is both expressing anger and also judging Gloria, but should he be the right person to judge Gloria considering his own records in fidelity? As Gloria puts it, "What about yours? You have committed a sacrilege and you know it". But the measures for assessing their actions are not administered on equality basis. And Chief knows it: "My God! She's not even sorry for her action!" To appropriately interpret this seeming injustice to Gloria, we must look at the cultural context of the utterances and their presuppositions.

    (a) Gloria, you are a disgrace to womanhood! This is a taboo!
    (b) There is something Gloria did that a woman should not do.
    (c) What Gloria did is ignominious.
    (d) Gloria's action is forbidden (within the speaker's cultural context).

The utterance (a) implicates (b) to (d). Chief's assertions are categorical and their truth conditions are taken for granted, at least within the cultural context of the film. In (10) again, linguistic choices help to reinforce the picture of Gloria painted in (9):

    (i)   Chief **caught** Gloria **in bed** with a small boy.
    (ii)   Gloria **caught in bed** with a small boy?
    (iii)   I never knew that woman was so **irresponsible.**
    (iv)   She's **a bad influence**.

Applying the Appraisal model, all the expressions in bold print in Utterances labeled (i) to (iv) which are reactions to, and describe, Gloria's action are negative evaluations. *Caught in bed* presupposes "Whatever she was doing in bed was bad and unlawful". Even Winnie's interjections depict the force of the expression: *God!*, *hei!* and *Jesus!* Then Tony's disparaging and judgmental epithets *so irresponsible* and *a bad influence* complete the negative profiling. Like Chief, Tony has no moral justification to make such comments. The only excuse he has is the cultural norm which views fidelity from gender perspective. The authorial voice, so to say, does not approve unfaithfulness in marriage on the part of men. However, the producer has to reflect the cultural reality which has different ethical codes in marriage for both sexes.

Our analysis so far has upheld the idea of cultural knowledge which forms part of the cultural category MARRIAGE different from the semantic concept which specifies a marriage to be a union between a man and a woman. The same universal concept may specify too that the union is one of equality. However, within the cultural context which is the setting of *Side Attraction,* there are additional cultural meanings or modifications of the universal semantic meaning. These meanings include:

1. Marriage is a union between a man and one or more women
2. The union is not one of equality in all respects
3. There may be different ethical codes that are gender related
4. Etc.

It is an open-ended thing because other indeterminate aspects apart from fidelity may apply, depending on the context.

Religious Beli#ef

Another aspect of our data is the prevalence of utterances which relate to the domain of religion. Here are examples of these:

(11) SITUATION: Grandma, the mother of Winnie, soliloquizes as she watches Winnie and Tony looking happy together. However, she sees beyond this façade. She knows about Tony's sex scandals.

Grandma: Tony, see how happy you are with your wife. Yet you cheat behind her back and even under her nose with her house maids**.** Why is the **devil so wicked** and people allow him **to come in** and **ruin** their happiness. Why? Why?

[Time: 1:46:18]

(12) SITUATION: Grandma overheard Winnie speaking with Richard on phone. She mistakenly took it that Winnie is cheating on her husband in retaliation. She counsels her.

Grandma: Listen to the voice of reasoning. Whatever Tony does, you don't have to pay him in his own coin, eh? Just **pray** for him. **God will touch** his heart.

[Time: 1:49:24]

(13) SITUATION: Grandma holds a discussion with Tony where she lets him know that she knows that he is responsible for Eno (the domestic servant's) pregnancy as well as that of the former servant, Marie.

Tony: Mama, please don't allow Winnie to know. I'll take care of it, I promise.

Grandma: I'm a **Christian** and I object to abortion. Why did you put yourself in this position? Why?

[Time: 2:10:28]

Religion is a domain which dominates Nigerian cultural life. Apart from politics, the next most lucrative field in Nigeria is religion. As in most African countries, life here is quite hard. The basic things of life are lacking: good health care, meaningful employment, comfortable

accommodation with necessary facilities to make life comfortable, and so forth. Above all, there is little social welfare. There is general despair among the people which goes with anxiety and fear. This kind of situation is already an ingredient for people who work on the psyche of others to exploit them. Such people find religion an effective instrument to use. That is why churches have been growing astronomically in Nigeria as the economic situation bites harder. Apart from politicians and a negligible number of businessmen, another group of people who own private jets are clergymen who enrich themselves by subtly exploiting the masses who flock to them in despair seeking spiritual solutions to mundane issues. It is so much a commercial activity that people own television channels where they air their religious activities such as miracles to attract followers. There are massive billboards all over Nigerian cities advertising religious activities. On radio considerable air time is subscribed by preachers. Everywhere people are inundated with religious matters. It dominates the life of Nigerians. Ironically, Nigeria is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Actually, the majority of the clergymen preach material prosperity and not piety and salvation of the soul because that would not attract followers to exploit.

Another reason why religion is pervasive in Nigeria is that the average Nigerian believes that there must be a spiritual angle to everything happening around him. Simple natural challenges such as ill-health, reproduction problems, not getting suitors for marriage or even inability to pass an examination are all the designs of the devil or people using the devil to attack them. Such people easily fall prey to any false clergyman who opens shop around the corner. They believe that all their problems would disappear the moment the clergyman ministers to them after paying the necessary tithe or any other gift.

The forgoing is to explain why religion is a salient issue in Nigeria. Lexicons and utterances relating to this field are replete in the Nigerian discourse, including film discourse. To interpret these utterances effectively, inference must be drawn from the cultural context. In (11), the underlined utterance *Why is the devil so wicked and people allow him to come in and ruin their happiness*, the speaker's presuppositions are a function of his religious belief:

(a) Devil exists
(b) The devil is wicked or even capable of having an emotion
(c) People can cause the devil to come into their lives
(d) The devil is capable of affecting somebody's life negatively
(e) The devil can cause happiness to cease and inversely cause sadness to manifest in people's life.

These presuppositions are the basic Christian convictions, and the degree of acceptance of the propositions by any viewer depends on his religious inclination. However, by uttering that expression, the speaker is implicating the following: "The devil is controlling Tony and so pushes him to indulge in the sex scandals". Given the way issues are given spiritual interpretation in Nigeria, the speaker has excluded the possibility of a weakness in Tony's character that makes it difficult for him to control his sexual instinct. He is now an indirect agent and can easily attribute the act to the devil, as people here often do.

In (12) Grandma enjoins Winnie to pray for Tony so that God will touch his heart to change and stop having extra-marital sex, even with young domestic servants who are barely older than his daughter. The speaker's presuppositions are in line with those listed (a) to (e) above. They are:

(f)   Prayer can change physical reality
(g)   Prayer can cause God to change somebody's behavior
(h)   God exists

As said earlier, acceptance of these propositions is a question of one's religious inclination. As observed by Ogu (2011, p. 157):

> The illocutionary force of utterances used in Nollywood in supernatural circumstances have to be considered in the light of the people's belief in the metaphysical world, in such things as 'spirits', both malevolent and benevolent, their belief in the ability of religious leaders, fetish priests, or anybody else, to wield the power to change physical reality by performing such illocutionary acts (cast spell, 'bind forces', perform miracles, etc.) For anybody who comes from a society where such beliefs are not held his/her appreciation of these prevalent aspects of Nollywood films might be affected.

In Nollywood films the use of prayers as a resolution of the plot of a story is common. It is like the literary term *Deus Ex Machina* where a knotty issue in a storyline gets resolved unexpectedly. It is the case with *Side Attraction* to some extent. Tony's change can be partly attributed to Grandma and Winnie's prayers.

In (13) the use of the word *Christian* in the utterance *I'm a Christian and I object to abortion* is different from the ordinary meaning of the word outside Nigeria. In Nigeria, there is a distinction between the regular moderate Christians and the Christians who belong to the fundamentalist Pentecostal sect who, it is believed, cannot compromise the tenets of the religion. Grandma implicates that she is of this latter sect and therefore cannot accept abortion as Tony's utterance suggests.

Other contextual phenomena

Other contextual issues found in the data which need inferencing to interpret their meaning will be briefly discussed in the rest of the paper. These include peculiar Nigerian lexical items and proverbs, code-mixing and pidgin.

Peculiar Nigerian lexical items and proverbs

In Nigeria, English is used as a second language. As a result, the language is used in an environment where it is competing with the numerous ethnic languages and the non-standard pidgin. Over the years, the language here has been altered in many ways to reflect the socio-cultural environment. Malinowski observed that "A language evolves in response to the specific demands of the society in which it is used" (as cited in Malmkjaer, 1991, p. 158). Achebe equally said, "…the English language should be able to carry the weight of African experience. For this to be so there must be a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (as cited in Ogunsiji, 2006, p.9). Such changes that reflect the new environment outside its native England has been tagged "nativization". Let us examine some examples of such utterances in the data.

(14)   Tony: **School daughter**, you mean.   [Time:00:12:43]

The expression *school daughter* is a coinage from public boarding schools in Nigeria. A student in a higher class, more often the apex class, picks a student at a lower level to serve her almost

like a domestic servant. The younger student washes her clothes and plates, fetches water for her and so on and so forth. The senior student (who is referred to as *Senior* by the junior one) protects her and gives her gifts if the senior student is the kind type. A good relationship could develop beyond school, as in the case of Winnie and Susan.

(15)   Gloria: Oh Chief (laughs), he has had his own fun with me. Right now he is in the hands of his   **third wife**.

[Time: 01:11:30]

The use of the expression has been explained earlier in (8) above. It means the third wife in a polygamous family.

(16)   Mrs Roberts: So how was your **youth service** in the North?

[Time: 01:34:06]

The expression *youth service* is an in-house slang in Nigeria which is a short form for National Youth Service Corps. It is a compulsory programme for graduates from Nigerian tertiary institutions to serve one year in another part of the country apart from their state of origin except in special cases. The idea is to foster national unity in this multi-ethnic country.

(17)   Richard: Mama, the **gateman** says there's a Miss Grace ….(indistinct surname)   at the gate asking to see you.

[Time: 1:29:04]

The expression *gateman* is a Nigerian coinage meaning *security guard.* The semantic motivation is metonymic by associating the security guard with his place of duty, usually beside the gate.

(18)   SITUATION: Grandma admonishes Tony in her discussion with him about his irresponsible behavior in the family.
         Grandma: I cannot sit down in this house and watch the goat hang itself with the rope.

[Time: 2:05:14]

(19)   SITUATION: The same as in Extract (18) above.
          Grandma: Tony, use your tongue to count your teeth**.**

[Time: 2:07:57]

(18) and (19) are transliterations of proverbs from the vernacular of the speaker. (18) literally means *I cannot just watch things go wrong in this house.* (19) means *Work it out yourself.* Grandma said this to Tony when he pretended not to understand what she was insinuating by her proverb in (18). These types of expression might be difficult for foreigners to interpret. They are metaphorical. For example, to sit down idly and watch a goat that is tethered give birth while still on the rope is considered a very serious negligence in Nigerian traditional society. The goat could suffocate itself to death. By analogy, if Grandma should keep silent without calling Tony to order she would be like somebody watching a goat give birth while tethered. In African literature, renowned writers like Chinua Achebe use transliterated proverbs to give their works local flavor.

Code-mixing and pidgin

The language repertoire of a typical educated Nigerian is a mix of Standard English, his vernacular, and pidgin. A lot of code-mixing takes place, especially where the speaker finds the English alternative non-existent or not readily available to him. Sometimes too, the level of formality determines the linguistic choice. Code-mixing is a mark of informality. Here are examples of code-mixing in the data:

> (20)　　Winnie:　　Eno, go and warm the ***edikangkon*** soup, make ***eba*** and bring to Auntie Gloria.
>
> [Time: 01:32:40]

> (21)　　SITUATION: Winnie beats Eno (her domestic servant) for being pregnant and not revealing the man responsible for it. Gloria, her friend, intervenes.
> Gloria:　　Don't you see she's not in the right condition to receive any beating. She'll faint in your hand and that's another ***wahala.***
> [Time: 01:32:51]

In (20), the viewer can infer that ***edikangkon*** refers to some kind of soup. Also he can infer that **eba** is some kind of food. *Wahala* in (21) means *trouble*. The text context can help in the interpretation. The speaker can infer from the propositional content of the conjoined clause that *wahala* could mean *another unpleasant development.*

Pidgin is also found in Nigerian film discourse where it helps to create a character stereotype of a low person, mostly domestic servants such as Eno.

> (22)　　SITUATION: Eno tells Tony, her master, that his wife, Winnie, has found out about her pregnancy by him.
>
> Eno:　　***Oga, madam don find out say I get belle now.***
> *(Begins to cry)* ***Oga! Oga o!o!***
> Tony:　　wait! Eno wait! I hope you didn't tell my wife that I'm the one that impregnated you?
> [Time: 01:37:07]

Note the difference in the codes of Eno and Tony. Also the honorific *Oga* (translated *master*) is another aspect of Nigerian everyday English which shows status and power. Sometimes producers can use pidgin to suggest solidarity among interlocutors of equal status.

CONCLUSION

In line with the objectives of this research, the study has attempted to examine data from Franca Brown's *Side Attraction* to determine how much utterances in the film depend on assumed background knowledge of the speakers and the recipients (which includes the viewers) for appropriate interpretation. The research has shown that semantic concepts of certain utterances are at variance with cultural categories, such as marriage, and as such pose challenges to viewers from different cultural contexts who may not share such assumed knowledge as the Nigerian producers of the film. Cultural categories also include how individuals perceive such things as religion based on their personal knowledge and cultural contexts. There are also other peculiar contextual issues within the Nigerian linguistic and cultural realities which may hinder

cross-cultural interpretation. These include semantic shift, in-house slang, lexical coinage, code-mixing and use of non-standard pidgin. The researcher has attempted to proffer explanations within his knowledge. In view of the tremendous popularity of the Nigerian films in the world today and the fact that these films are available globally through You Tube and other media platforms, this researcher is recommending that more linguistic studies should be carried out in this field to adequately characterize the Nollywood films. Also a comprehensive dictionary of the Nigerian English is necessary.

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