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## **EDITORIAL**

Every academic environment is sustained by learning through rigorous methods. Research is one and the focal point for assessment. A serious member of the academic community is measured by the quality and number of academic articles.

In spite of the desire to acquire many research reports, this edition has insisted on standards and quality. It is important to note that many articles have been rejected for not meeting our requirements.

The first and most obvious task of our journal is to provide a level playing field for researchers all over the globe in language-related disciplines, which is the vehicle for conveying knowledge. In this edition, twenty-seven (27) articles have undergone academic scrutiny from our blind reviewers.

To our esteemed contributors and readers, thought-provoking articles are expected and we are ready to publish them in the next volume.

**Professor Ali Amadi Alkali,  
Editor-in-Chief,  
JAJOLLS: Jalingo Journal of Linguistics and Literary Studies,  
Department of Languages and Linguistics,  
Taraba State University, Jalingo.**

## **FOR READERS**

This volume of JAJOLLS (Jalingo Journal of Linguistics and Literary Studies, Volume 8, Issue 1) adheres to the guidelines of the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual for editing and formatting the featured papers. Renowned for its clear and user-friendly citation system, the APA manual also provides valuable guidance on selecting appropriate headings, tables, figures, language, tone, and reference styles, resulting in compelling, concise, and refined scholarly presentations. Furthermore, it serves as a comprehensive resource for the Editorial Board, navigating the entire scholarly writing process, from authorship ethics to research reporting and publication best practices.

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The “Jalingo Journal of Linguistics and Literary Studies” (JAJOLLS) is a publication of the Department of Language and Linguistics, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria. This journal publishes reports in relation to all aspects of linguistics, literary and cultural studies.

### **Manuscripts Submission**

Three hard copies of the article with text, charts, tables, figures, plates or any other original illustration should be sent to the editor-in-chief JAJOLLS, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State Nigeria. Submission should either be in English, French, Hausa, or Arabic languages. Articles should be typed in double line spacing with a wide margin on each side only on A4 sized paper not exceeding 15 pages including abstract with not more than 6-7 keywords. Articles are to be submitted with Five Thousand Naira (N5,000) assessment and handling charges. By submitting an article to JAJOLLS, the author(s) agree that the exclusive rights to produce and distribute the articles to the publisher.

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## Salawu, Rashidat Omotola



Department of English and Linguistics Kwara State  
University, Malete

### Common ground in Ahmed Yerima's *Orisa Ibeji* and *Owiwi*

#### Abstract

Language is an important factor in communication which helps in decoding meaning and enhancing communicative interaction in the society. Pragmatics deals with the use of language as intended by the speaker. This is determined by context and what the hearer infers from what is being said. Listeners make inferences from what is said in order to arrive at the speakers' intended meaning and this can be achieved through certain prior shared experiences by the interlocutors in the discourse. These shared experiences or information are referred to as Common Ground (CG). The purpose of this study is to investigate how Yerima employs Common Ground features in the dissemination and interpretation of the speakers' intended message in *Orisa Ibeji* and *Owiwi*. The data were selected purposively from the texts and analysed using Bach and Harnish's theory, Clark's classification of Common Ground and Common Ground features such as implicature, presupposition, mutual contextual beliefs and intention. The findings of the study showed that these features help to establish Common Ground among the participants and speakers' effective use of language which is ultimately dependent on it due to the shared knowledge among interlocutors in texts. The study therefore concluded that CG which is an indispensable feature in meaning explication process acts as lubricants in any communicative process as it helps in the conceptualisation and dissemination of the intended messages in literary texts.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Common Ground, Grounding in Conversation, Pragmatic Features

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#### Background to the study

Osisanwo (2003) believes that language is human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication. Communication is an important aspect of human life. In the words of Adler and Rodman (2006), communication refers to the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behaviour of other persons. Babatunde (2007) opines that human development depends, to a large

extent, on communication and that the purpose of language is the enhancement of communicative interaction in the society.

Language is therefore important in decoding meaning and the aspect of linguistics that studies the act of meaning decoding is pragmatics. Yule (1996, p.3) opines that pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by the speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). In other words, Pragmatics is the study of speaker's meaning. He further explains that pragmatics involves the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. Listeners make inferences from what is said in order to arrive at the speakers' intended meaning and this can be achieved through certain prior shared experiences by the interlocutors in the discourse. These shared experiences or information are referred to as Common Ground (CG).

According to the orthodox view of pragmatics, Pietarinen (2006, p.371) asserts that "the esteemed notion of "Common Ground" was introduced into the modern theory in the wake of the speech-act theories by David Lewis, Stephen Schiffer, and Robert Stalnaker, who applied the concept of mutual or common knowledge and belief (Pietarinen, 2006). Stalnaker (2002) explains that since common beliefs emanate from individual beliefs, the way they change in conversation will be a function of ordinary belief changes and that in a conversation; the beliefs of the participants that are relevant to it will include both beliefs about the subject matter of the conversation and also beliefs about the ongoing conversations itself.

Participants in a discourse understand the intended message through shared beliefs or knowledge. This is because speakers take a lot of information to be given and thus give outlines as it were, of whatever it is they mean to convey, leaving the hearer to supply the details and enrich the outlines in order to arrive at exactly what the speaker intends to communicate (Adeoti, 2015). CG can be studied from different perspectives which include psychology, intercultural communication, cognitive psychology, just but a few. This paper will however study CG from the pragma-linguistic perspective. Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. Clark's (1996, 2009) concept of CG, Clark and Brennan's (1991) concept of grounding and Bach and Harnish's (1979) theory will be used to analyse Yerima's *Orisa Ibeji* and *Owiwi*. CG is the shared belief between speakers in a conversation. It is used in order to make the hearer arrive at the intended meaning of the speaker. The primary aim of this paper is investigate how Yerima employs CG features: implicature, presupposition, Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) and intention, in the dissemination and interpretation of the speakers' intended message in *Orisa Ibeji* and *Owiwi*.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **The meaning of pragmatics**

Grundy (2000) defines pragmatics as the study of the relations that hold between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding. In other words, context and language are central in pragmatics as they determine the meaning of utterances. Leech (1983) opines that pragmatics is the study of meaning in relation to speech situations. The speech situation enables the speaker use language to achieve a particular effect on the mind of the hearer. Thus the speech is goal-oriented (i.e. the meaning which the speaker or writer intends to communicate).

## **Common Ground: History, definitions and sources**

Colston (2008) writes that common ground is the shared experiences between interlocutors in a discourse and this is achieved through prior shared knowledge between the speakers. He explains that common ground is additional information that an interlocutor generates or encounters and then encodes into short- and/or long-term memory for ongoing or later use (Colston, 2008). Colston further submits that common ground might thus be best viewed as an adjustable component of conversations, both in terms of how much is needed for a task at hand, as well as how much different speakers wish to rely on it for a given conversational exchange (Colston, 2008). He further adds that this submission suggests that rather than always being a pre-existing memory schema that a speaker holds in mind and consults prior to making an utterance, it is a resource that a hearer also consults in the process of determining the meaning of an utterance (Colston, 2008). The consequence of this according to him is that CG is what people believe that they and their interlocutors must mutually know, after the fact, given that a speaker made a production that was comprehended in a certain way by a hearer (Colston, 2008).

Pietarinen (2006) declares that the esteemed notion of “Common Ground” was introduced into the modern theory in the wake of the speech-act theories by David Lewis, Stephen Schiffer, and Robert Stalnaker, who applied the concept of mutual or common knowledge and belief. Robert Stalnaker popularised the notion of CG based on Lewis' common knowledge, to account for the way in which information accumulates in conversation:

Roughly speaking the presuppositions of a speaker are the propositions whose truth he takes for granted as part of the background of the conversation...presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation, what is treated as their common knowledge or mutual knowledge (Clark, 2009, p.116 reporting Stalnaker 2002).

## **Bach and Harnish's Theory**

Bach and Harnish's (1979) theory describes a speech act from the recognition of the speaker's “intention” and “inference”. They disagree with the conventional-based theories as postulated by Austin and Searle. Bach and Harnish are of the opinion that linguistic communication is basically an inferential process. The inferencing procedure states from the recognition of the speaker's intention, and the recognition of the intention is based on a mutual understanding between the speaker and the hearer. This, Bach and Harnish term as mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs). Adegbija (1982) opines that differences in MCBs can bring about illocutionary force. Bach and Harnish (1979, p.6) explain the point of Adegbija's opinion thus; “the hearer relies on, and is intended to rely on, MCBs to determine from the meaning of the sentence uttered, what the speaker is saying, and from that, the force and context of the speaker's illocutionary act”. Their contribution are in three folds; to suggest a very general Speech Act Schema (SAS) for communicative illocutionary, to show how inferences based on mutual contextual belief (MCB) plays role in communicative speech acts and to make detailed use of Grice's notion of conversational implication in fleshy theory. Apart from MCBs, they also come up with other socially based beliefs, which the hearer relies on for his inference. These beliefs are Linguistic Presumption (LP) and Communicative Presumption (CP). They suggest that LP is

the mutual belief in a linguistic community that a particular language is shared and that “unless there is evidence to the contrary, the hearer is presumed capable of determining the meaning and the referents of the expression in the context of utterance” (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, & Harnish, 2001). CP on the other hand is the mutual belief that whenever a member, S (speaker) says something to another member H (hearer), he is doing so with some recognisable illocutionary intent.

Bach and Harnish (1979) maintain that the pattern of inference involves the Speech Act Schemata – (SAS), and also argue that Presumption of Literariness – (PL) (that is, if S could be speaking literally under the circumstance, then, he is, if not, S is speaking non-literally) is relied upon by H to infer that what S is saying. They identify the strategies in the inferential process as Locutionary Strategy, Direct Literal Strategy and Direct non-literal Strategy. Locutionary strategy according to Bach and Harnish (1979) is based on H's knowledge of the language, the LP, the CP and MCBs. That is, the hearer infers from the locutionary act, based on what the utterance means in the language. Direct literal strategy helps to identify whether or not S means what he says and nothing else. With literally based strategy, H employs the MCBs and CP to determine in a particular context, whether there is an action connected with the literal utterance. Through the MCB and CP, it may also employ the direct non-literal strategy to infer that S's utterance is non-literal and indirect, since a certain act has been identified to be connected with the overt one, which H recognises. Lastly, when the utterance and lead H to infer that S's utterance must be non-literal and indirect as a result of another illocutionary act, which is connected with it, the non-literal based indirect strategy has been employed (Bach and Harnish 1979, pp. 70-80 in Adegbija, 1982). Therefore, Bach and Harnish's theory is relevant to this study because the theory emphasises on the intention of the speaker and the recognition of these intentions allows the readers to have a proper understanding and interpretation of texts.

### **Grounding in conversation**

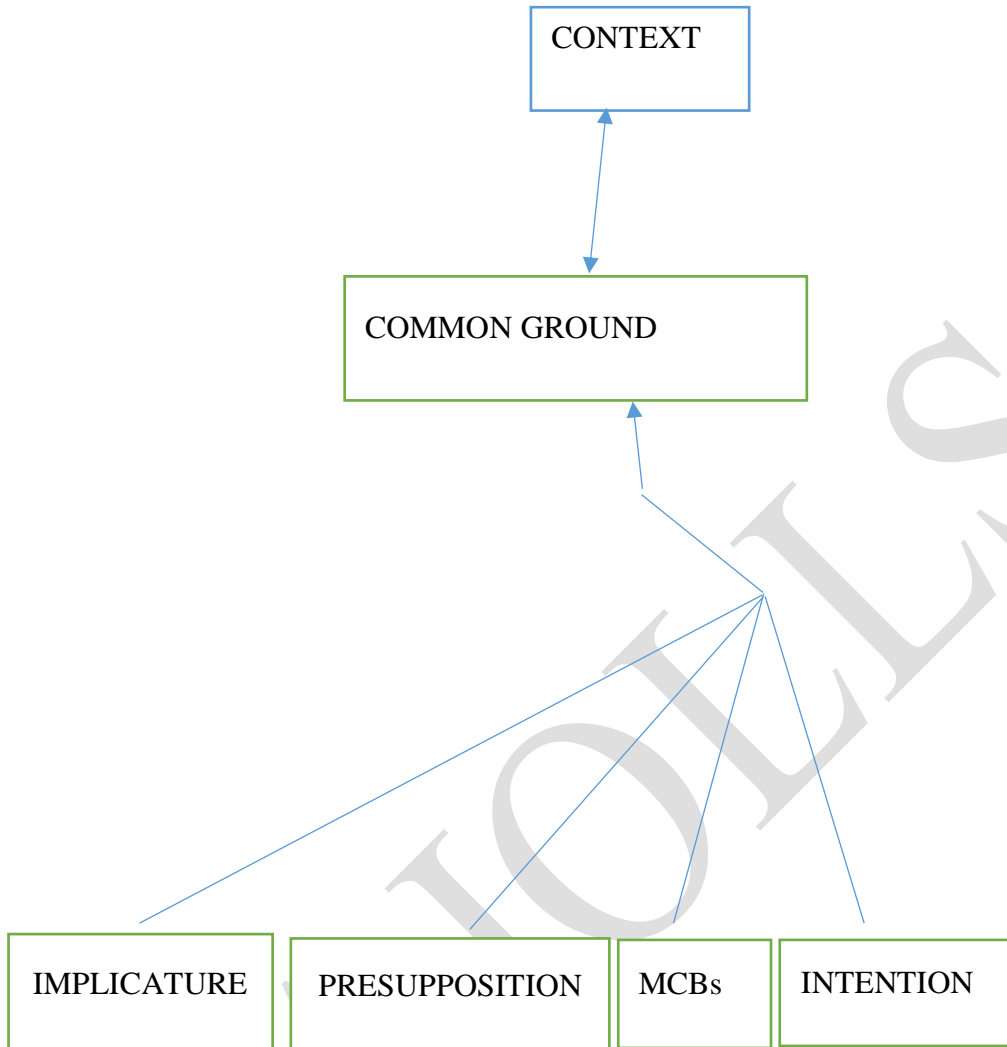
The idea of grounding was proposed by **Clark and Brennan** (1991). Clark and Brennan (1991) affirm that grounding comprises of mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs and mutual assumptions that is essential for communication between two people. In communication, common ground cannot be properly updated without a process called grounding (Clark and Brennan, 1991). They explain that grounding is so basic to communication and participants try to establish that what has been said has been understood, and that participants try to ground what has been said and make it part of their common ground.

Clark and Schaefer (1989) explain that in the state of grounding criterion, groups use three methods of reaching an understanding that they can move forward:

1. **New Contribution:** A partner moves forward with a new idea and waits to see if their partner expresses confusion
2. **Assertion of Acceptance:** The partner receiving the information asserts that he understands by smiling, nodding or verbally confirming the other partner. They may also assert their understanding by remaining silent.
3. **Request for Clarification:** The partner receiving the information asks for clarification.

For CG to be achieved in a discourse, the place of the context cannot be over-emphasised. The context defines what presuppositions are drawn, what implicatures are generated to bring out the intended messages of the speakers in texts. Although,

this study adapts Clark's (1996, 2009) concept of CG and Clark and Brennan's (1991) concept of grounding, however, the inadequacies of the model necessitated the development of a new model to accommodate the needs of this study.



(Researcher's Proposed Model of CG 2024)

The schema above is an attempt to provide an approach to the analysis of the language use in texts with the major aim of explaining how CG can be achieved in a discourse. Participants in an interaction exchange information in order to come to a common understanding of a particular situation. The elements in the model are interwoven or interconnected having context as the central element in which other elements are based. Context is the surrounding, environment, background or setting that determines, specifies or clarifies the meaning of an event or utterance. Hence, context helps interlocutors to stabilise meaning in its appropriate form and thus inform their common knowledge about a particular utterance. Context as represented in the model refers to the physical, psychological, linguistic, social and cultural contexts which help to interpret meaning. Implicature is an implied meaning that is not expressed directly. Hence, drawing implicature in conversations serves as the basis of generating CG. That is, as many implied meanings people can get from conversations help to develop their MCB with the speaker and this serves as the basis for CG in any conversation. When participants in a discourse have a CG, then presupposition which is the assumption made before hand; a preliminary conjecture

or speculation about interlocutor's utterance is inevitable. That is, when interlocutors have a common knowledge about the topic of a discourse, it will be easy for them to make certain assumptions about what a speaker mean.

Mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs) are the shared knowledge participants in a discourse share with each other or one another about a topic, hence, mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs) serve as a building block to establish CG in a discourse. Intention is the goal or purpose behind a specific utterance. Since intention is the goal a speaker has in mind when making a particular utterance, therefore, when there is CG between speakers, intention will be easily determined. Hence, CG as a branch of pragmatics subsumes other pragmatic features in order for meaning to be generated in utterances.

### **Research methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative approach to analyse some dialogues/conversations between characters in the drama texts entitled *Orisa Ibeji* and *Owiwi*. It analyses the data descriptively using common ground features such as implicature, presupposition, mutual contextual belief and intention. What constitutes data for this study is eight purposively selected extracts from the texts; four from each text. The data were purposively sampled because considerations are accorded to the intended meaning of characters in the texts.

### **Data presentation and analysis**

#### **Implicature**

Datum 1

*Adedigba: But he came! Would I lie?*

*Oluawo: Not for you I am sure. Anyway, did you offer him a little sacrifice when you awoke?*

*Adedigba: No. By the time he left, I knew better.*

*Oluawo: You knew what better Kabiyesi?*

*Adedigba: That I was the sacrifice.*

*Oluawo: Ewo!*

*(Orisa Ibeji, p.13).*

In this conversation, both the king, Adedigba and Oluawo have a shared knowledge of the subject matter which is "death". The king breaches the flow of information when he flouts maxim of quantity (No. By the time he left, I knew better) by not making his contribution as informative as required. Therefore, in order to understand what the king said, Oluawo requests for clarification, which is a grounding method (You knew what better Kabiyesi?) to aid CG in the discourse.

Datum 2

*Saura: ...Woman, take your title and go rule both worlds! Either way, I shall be there with you.*

*Adunni: No, I shall shatter it all! I shall tear to pieces and turn to strands of disgust that which holds me down. I must break this yoke that binds me to a doom of endless flight*

(*Owiwi*, pp.125-126).

In Saura's utterance, "both worlds" means the Christian religion and the fetish practices. Adunni's utterance "I must break this yoke that binds me to a doom of endless flight" implies that she rejects the offer to be the head of the coven and embraces the offer to be the head of the women in church. Hence, both participants have a shared knowledge about what "both world" means.

### **Presupposition**

#### Datum 1

*Saura: Woman, what needs drive you this time of the night, that you defy the fear of weakening my master?*

*Adedigba: I have, old one and children too*

(*Orisa Ibeji*, p.36).

The conversation is between Saura and Adedigba who disguises like a woman. Saura's utterance "that you defy the fear of weakening my master?" presupposes that Saura has a master who gets attracted to women easily.

#### Datum 2

*Ifaoseke: Have you not heard? After the death of Oba Idele, the whole village turned against Orunmila. No one comes here anymore. I sit alone brooding over what happened five years ago. That is, how we got to this point that the village loathes my master and I begin to unfold. Going over the events through my mind, from the moment they invited us to the palace for the ritual of promise, where they wanted the three dominant gods of the land to take from his oath of leadership at his Ipebi. You remember?*

*Adunni: Like yesterday. Every word that was said echoes in my head.*

(*Owiwi*, p.82).

Ifaoseke's utterance "After the death of Oba Idele...No one comes here anymore" presupposes that the villagers stop seeking for Orunmila's help because they believe he has a hand in the death of their king. Also, "...that the village loathes my master and I" presupposes that he has a master which is Orunmila. Furthermore, "they invited us to the palace for the ritual of promise, where they wanted the three dominant gods of the land..." presupposes two things. The first is that the ritual of promise took place in the palace earlier and that the land has other gods but attached importance to only three out of these gods which are; Esu, Orumila and the witches.

### Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs)

#### Datum 1

*Adedigba:* Good, as long as you know that the matter at hand is serious, not food. Balogun, have you told him everything?

*Balogun:* Everything, Kabiyesi. He has come prepared.

(Orisa Ibeji, p.19).

Mutual contextual beliefs are assumptions held prior to or during occasions of interaction and they facilitate the communicative process. Here, the use of restricted code (everything) between Adedigba and Balogun shows that the speakers have a mutual knowledge about the topic of discourse.

#### Datum 2

*Osi:* And you asked him to ead?

*Otun:* Haa... We thought...

*Mayegun:* You thought wrong Otun, and now we must bear the consequences like men.

(Owiwi, p.90).

Mayegun interrupted Otun's speech because he already has a prior knowledge about the promise the king made to the witches who is to allow them rule the town for a month. Therefore, there is a mutual knowledge among the participants in this discourse.

### Intention

#### Datum 1

*Akuda:* Yes. But I was told that only you can deliver them. I shall also set you free. Ilari shall take you to the outskirts of your village, Itakumosa, and set you free forever.

*Tade:* (Knees). Haa, Yeye I will do it. I am sure I can do it

(Orisa Ibeji, p.51).

The meaning of "free" in the above discourse is ambiguous. To Akuda, her purpose is to kill the slave; Tade after helping in the delivery of her grandchildren in order not to leave any witness to the fact that the Queen gave birth to a set of twins. While to the slave, "free" means freedom as a slave to Yeye Osun. Hence, CG was not established because Akuda's intention carries more weight than her words. The intention of Akuda was however communicated when the slave was killed in the later part of the drama text.

#### Datum 2

*Paga:* In her new hoarse, croaky voice, she said my daughter was next. And since I do not have a daughter I thought she meant, me... the only daughter of her late sister...her daughter...me...therefore was next.



*Did I waste the smug smile, mama?*

(*Owiwi*, p.71).

Before Iya Agba Fadelola died, she mentioned her successor “she said my daughter was next”. Iya Agba’s utterance is ambiguous but her real intention is to inform Paga that her daughter Adunni will succeed her. Paga however misinterpreted her utterance to mean herself, that is, Paga.

### **Findings**

The research findings reveal that CG is an indispensable component of meaning explication process in terms of the pivotal role it plays in the conceptualisation and dissemination of messages as encoded by the speakers in the texts studied. The findings of the study also reveal that context is an important element in the interpretation of utterances and it helps the addressees to recognise the intention of the speakers in a communicative act. Furthermore, the speakers in the texts rely exclusively on the common knowledge they share via the use of implicature, presupposition, mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs) in order to arrive at the intended messages of their utterances. This study deals with the CG features in Ahmed Yerima’s *Orisa Ibeji* and *Owiwi*. It provides a theoretical foundation to CG and provides an approach to the analysis of language use in texts with the major aim of examining how CG can be achieved in a discourse.

### **Conclusion**

Listeners depend on the shared knowledge that exists between them and their speakers in order to fully comprehend the intended message or meaning of an utterance in a particular or specific context. Context helps to stabilise hydra-sense of linguistic structures in their appropriate forms. Thus, Common Ground is an imperative or vital tool of meaning explication. It acts as lubricants in any communicative process as it is an indispensable feature in understanding texts.

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