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⟨5⟩ Perspectives of Interpretation of Meaning in English

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Introduction

It is not unusual that 'meaning' presents a problem of definition to language scholars. Like many other concepts, meaning is either a vague or an ambiguous term, depending on the way one looks at it. As far back as 1923, Ogden and Richards gave a representative list of sixteen main definitions which, according to them, "reputable students of meaning have favoured". Recent studies may have observed some considerable overlaps in most of these definitions, but the multifarious types, perspectives and interpretations of meanings are still with us (Leech 1974, Lyons 1977).

Notwithstanding the difficulty in defining meaning, however, scholars have found the term indispensable in linguistic description as well as in many other subject areas - philosophical, scientific, etc. In linguistics, despite the problems associated with it, interpretation of utterances of various sizes - the word, phrase, clause, sentence and text - continues to be the main preoccupation. Learners continue to have great difficulties in the production and interpretation of utterances due to, partly, the diverse procedures of meaning interpretation relevant to demands at specific occasions.

This study aims at describing different perspectives and types of meaning in utterances in English. The description is anchored in data and practical illustrations from spoken and written texts. It utilizes approaches that are both familiar and current in linguistic description to present meaning and interpretation in a comprehensible way to learners.

Some Perspectives of Meaning Description

Bierwisch (1970:168) states four things which semantics theory must do: first it must make reference to the syntactic structure in a precise way; second, it must systematically represent the meaning of the single words (or, more generally, of the lexical elements, including lexicalized phrases like idioms, isolated compounds, etc.); third, it must show how the structure of words and syntactic relations interact in order to constitute the interpretation of sentences; and lastly, it must indicate how these interpretations are related to the things spoken about. Although Bierswisch's conditions above present the goal of a linguistic perspective of meaning, it is clear that, in many respects, the goal is limited and may not adequately account for several occurrences of features of meaning in texts. A fuller understanding of the nature of meaning and its roles in interpretation can be got by considering some perspectives and types of meaning below.

A perspective of meaning is that presented by Bloomfield (1933) and other scholars (Malinowsky 1923, Wittgenstein 1953) who define meaning in terms of the extralinguistic world. Bloomfield defines meaning in terms of the speech situation and learners' response. Malinowski defines it in terms of the

purpose of language in a situational context and Wittgenstein defines it in terms of different instances of language use.

Another perspective is that which accounts for meaning within the linguistic structure and not in terms of the outside world of experience. Chomsky (1965), for example, claims to describe linguistic competence and not performance of the speaker-hearer in the extra-linguistic world. In his presentation of 'generative grammar (or syntax)', he describes semantics as the level which assigns interpretation to the structural description generated by syntax at the deep structure. Katz and Postal (1964) claim that the semantic interpretation of lexical items is facilitated by the existence of a dictionary component and a projection rule component. While Chomsky (1965) assigns an interpretive role to semantics and a generative role to grammar, some other scholars like Lakoff, McCawley and Chafe argue otherwise that sentences, in the first instance, are generated as semantic entities before they are described syntactically and phonologically.

The latter perspective, which is a notional variant of Chomsky's presentation, is known as 'generative semantics'. In this framework, McCawley (1968) goes on to suggest the possibility of a grammar consisting of a formative rule component, which specifies the membership of a class of well-formed semantic representations and a transformational component, which consists of rules correlating semantic representations with a surface syntactic representation. Meanwhile, in this framework, there is another proposal of a 'functional grammar' by Fillmore (1968) which describes the case relations such as 'actor-action-goal, beneficiary', etc., between verb and nouns in a predicate expression. This proposal has a deep influence on the system-structure description of cognitive meaning by Halliday (1970).

A third perspective of semantic description recognises semantics as an ubiquitous term which applies to all levels of language description, both formal and non-formal. At the formal linguistic level are recognised phonological, graphological, syntactic or grammatical and lexical meanings, while at the non formal (extra-linguistic) level is recognised the situational meaning. Another kind of meaning recognised here is the contextual meaning (cf. Firth, 1962 and Berry1977), which relates both the formal and non-formal meanings of language. Context is an abstract category of linguistics which provides the link between formal items and situational components of language use. Two kinds of context are associated with contextual meaning, viz. the 'context of culture' (Firth 1962) and the 'context of situation' (Malinowski 1923 and Firth 1962). The conditions of meaning in a context of culture (or social context) specify the conventional (socio-cultural) rules of behaviour which participants must share before they can communicate successfully with each other, whereas the conditions of meaning in a situational context must further specify relevant features of immediate and wider experiences of the specific participants, in addition to the conventional rules. Contextual meaning generates the concept of 'stylistic' meaning, which describes relations between linguistic forms and features of situational contexts;

while it also includes 'co-textual' meaning, which relates particular linguistic features to one another in the linguistic environment.

A fourth perspective of semantics is the one observed in the proposal of a 'semiotic' dimension of language study (Morris, 1946). A semiotic description subsumes three interrelated types of relations, viz. the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic relations. While syntax relates signs to one another, semantics relates signs to their real objects and pragmatics relates signs to users of a language. Since semiotics is the study of sign systems in general, its concerns extend far beyond the interpretation of linguistics utterances into the interpretation of art work, paintings, dances, drama and, indeed, other forms of representation. Apparently, a semiotic description cannot thus be the goal of our study, which focuses on an analysis of utterances. However, deriving from this perspective is the concept of 'pragmatics' which has proved very useful in linguistic studies (Kempson, 1977; Lyons, 1977; Yule, 1996 and Mey 2001), especially as it pertains to the interpretation of utterances in context.

Concepts and Categories of Meaning Description

The concepts and categories pertaining to some major types of meaning, viz. linguistic, ideational (cognitive), interpersonal (social), textual and contextual meaning, are mentioned here as they pertain to the interpretation of utterances in English. Linguistic meaning is subdivided into phonological, graphological and grammatical (i.e syntactic and lexical) meanings. The ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings express the experiences and thoughts of participants, social roles which language is used to perform and the organisation of text respectively. Contextual meaning is the basis for stylistic meaning as well as a necessary condition for linguistic pragmatics. According to Mey (2000:7):

> ... Not even the smallest utterance or a single word can be understood in isolation. It is the user and his or her conditions of production and consumption of language that in the final analysis determine the way his or her words are understood.

The analysis of texts below utilizes mainly the system-structure (systemic linguistics) approach of description of meaning in terms of semantic roles of items in the linguistic system (Halliday 1970, 1973, 1985, Berry 1975, 1977, Bloor and Bloor 1996). The description of textual meaning further utilizes ideas of thematic progression and cohesion from Danes (1974), Fries and Francis (1992) Halliday and Hasan (1976) to complement insights from the above. The description of contextual meaning benefits from the works of several scholars such as Firth (1962), Malinowski(1923), Lyons(1977), Halliday(1978), Yule(1996) and Mey (2001), amongst others. Below is a highlight of categories and systems relevant to the meanings analyzed:

Phonology: sound, syllable, stress, feet, rhyme scheme, rhythm
Graphology: capitalization, punctuation, orthographic form (i.e. paragraph,

stanza, dialogue)

Grammar: Transitivity- process, participants, circumstances

    Mood- declarative, interrogative, imperative

    Modality- non-modal, modal

    Polarity-negative, positive

    Tense- non future (past, present), future (past, present)

    Aspect- neutral, continuous (progressive) completed (perfective),

    Theme- marked, unmarked; simple, complex.

Lexis: lexical occurrence, repetition, set, range, collocation, relationships;

Context: subject matter, style/tenor, mode situation, culture, presupposition,

    implicature, inference, face, setting, participants, ends, acts, key,

    instrumentalities, norm, genre,intended and extended meaning;

Textual meaning: Thematic progression: simple linear, constant, derived and

    split 'theme- rheme' themes, cohesion and coherence;

Rhetorical meaning: Figurative expressions: imagery, simile, metaphor, personification,

sound   symbolism, fictionalization, structural repetition and parallelism.

Overall, the analysis of meaning is done on the assumption of an interconnection of 'real', 'empirical' and 'actual' domains of language description identified by scholars (Sealey and Carter 2004). The real domain includes both the mechanisms internal to the human organism, which make language processing possible and those properties and powers of language which enable inter-subjective communication. The empirical domain refers to those aspects of language use or behaviour that are capable of perception by the human senses. The actual domain is that part of reality which happens, as distinct from all those things which might have happened but did not. According to Sealey and Carter (2004:71),

--- It is not all the real powers and properties of language that are manifested at the level of empirical. It is some linguistic phenomena that 'actualize' the 'real' to become empirical.

The Analysis of Meaning in Some English Texts

The illustrations below are based on sample texts representative of the prose, poetry and drama modes. The texts are made up two extracts (a dialogue and a monologue) from African literary English texts and a poem from *The Penguin Book of English Verse*. It is possible to do a detailed interpretation of the meaning of each of the three texts. But, then, such a step is fraught with dangers of repetition and redundancies. To prevent such danger, we shall vary our interpretation by doing an analysis of some linguistic meaning of Texts A and B and a contextual meaning of Text C. The focus of analysis of Text A will be, more precisely, grammatical and lexical meanings; that of Text B will be phonological and graphological meaning; and that of Text C will be an interrelation of situational and linguistic meaning. The analysis of each text is done after the presentation of the passage.

An Analysis of Linguistic Meaning (Grammar and Lexis)
TEXT A

'Make you no worry for that,' said his friend, 'Madam de look am well well!'1 That day I come pick madam from where I think say them make small quarrel …'

'Shut your mouth.2 Who tell you say we de make small quarrel?'3

'Madam, I no need for somebody to tell me when man and woman make small quarrel.4 When you see the woman eye begin de flash like ambulance you go know.5 But that day when I de vex because oga shine torch for my eye the same madam we de grumble come tell me not to worry because the oga can talk sharp but na very kind man.6 No be so you tell me as we drive for night?'7

    Elewa nodded.8

'But why you no tell me at the same time say na Editor of Gazette?'9

'Why I go tell you? 10 And if I tell you wetin you go do with am? 11 Illiteracy de read paper for your country?'12

    Chinua Achebe: *Anthills of the Savannah, p.137*

The above passage presents an instance of use of Pidgin English in African Literary English. It is presented deliberately for interpretation here out of interest and also in order to show that a passage in Pidgin English, as a variety of use of English in Nigeria, can also be analysed linguistically. The focus of analysis here is on grammatical and lexical meanings. We present the features in the passage in a table below . The unit of analysis is the main clause, to which a subordinate clause gives support in a sentence.

The analysis of the text reveals thirteen sentences with twelve main clauses and a minor one. Nine of the major sentences are simple, while three are complex. Sentence 5 is complex because it has two clauses, one of which is in 'hypotactic' relationship to the other; the subordinate clause gives circumstantial details about a period of observation of a person's countenance. Also, the subordinate clause in Sentence 6 gives an extensive circumstantial detail about time pertaining to the experience being reported in the main clause. Sentence 11 also has a subordinate clause which expresses a supposition (via the item 'if') pertaining to the question asked in the consequent main clause. Furthermore, two of the simple sentences (Sentences 4 and 5) express elaborate circumstantial details about time via clauses which realise 'Adjunct' in the sentences. In general, all the sentences of the passage realise narrative report by the author: Sentence 1 is a direct speech with a matrix and two sequent clauses; Sentence 8 represents the author's description; and the remaining sentences (Sentences 2-7 and 9-12) represent free direct speech, i.e. direct speech without author's comments via matrix clauses.

Talking about the process and participants features, one could see the 'verbalized' (verb) process expressed more than other process options. Things are

either being told (or supposed to be told) to the speakers (sentences 7 and 10) or the listeners (Sentence 4 and 11).

Table 1: Some Features of Grammatical Meaning in an English Text

Systemic Categories

Sentence Type	Process	Participants	Circum-stance	Polarity	Tense	Mood/Modality	Theme
simple	verb, rep	say, verbiage	time	Pos	non-fut	dec n-mod	mkd
simple simple	mat verb	actor, goal		pos pos		imp	unmkd unmkd
simple	ment,react	sayer, target		neg pos	non-fut	int n-mod	unmkd mkd
Simple	ment, cog	sens, phen	time	pos	Non-fut	dec n-mod	mkd
Complex	verb rep	sens, ?	time		fut	dec mod	mkd
Simple	rel, eq	-	time	neg	non-fut	dec n-mod	unmkd
Simple	mat	sayer, target	time	pos	non-fut	dec n-mod	
Simple	verb	identifying	time	neg	non-fut	dec n-mod	unmkd
Simple	verb	actor, goal			non-fut	dec n-mod	unmkd
Complex	mat	sayer, target	time	pos	non-fut	dec n-mod	unmkd
Simple	ment, cog	sayer, target		pos	fut	int mod	unmkd
		actor goal/ben		pos	fut	int mod	unmkd
		sens, phen			non-fut	int n-mod	

Summary of Features

Sentence Type	Process	Polarity	Tense	Mood	Modality
simple 9 complex 3	verbalized 5 mental 3 material 3 relation 1	positive 9 negative 3	non-future 9 future 3	dec 7 int 4 imp.1	non-modal 7 modalized 4
Theme marked 3 unmarked 9	Aspect Neutral 11 non-neutral 1				

However, unlike the instances of 'telling' or 'saying' above, which come from the speech of characters in the passage, the saying in Sentence 1 is the comment of the author himself.

Following the verbalised process in terms of frequency of choice is the 'mental' (ment) process. The characters are 'sensing phenomena' in form of 'cognition' (Sentences 5 and 12) or 'reaction' (Sentence 4); very often it is their ability to sense something that is expressed (Sentences 5 and 12) rather than their inability to do something (Sentence 4). Meanwhile, the verbalised and mental processes in the passage are expressed alongside 'circumstantial' details about 'time' given on them. The third option of process in the text is the 'material' process (mat) which, on two occasions, express actions in which the actors coincide with the goals, i.e. speakers perform actions on themselves, i.e. on parts of their own bodies (Sentences 2 and 8) and, on one occasion, a speaker expresses an action in which there are an actor, goal and beneficiary (Sentence 11). Lastly, one instance of a 'relational' process is observed in the passage (Sentence 7). The process is an 'identifying' one which represents a question asked by a character as to whether something is the case or not.

The primary tense options in the passage are seen clearly in two terms: non-future and future. The future tense is marked by the verbal item 'go' (e.g., Sentence 5), which also performs a modal function in Pidgin English, while the non-future tense is not marked by this item. Sometimes, the non-future tense overtly has past tense forms (e.g., Sentences 1 and 8); sometimes, it has present tense forms (e.g., Sentences 4 and 6); and sometimes, the verb forms do not overtly show that the tense is past or present (e.g. Sentences 4, 7 and 11). It is only by recourse to context that we recognise that the verbs formed on very many occasions refer to past time events. With respect to aspect, only two sentences have 'non-neutral' aspect, while the others are 'neutral'. Sentence 3 expresses a 'progressive' action, while Sentence 12 expresses a habitual process.

The options of mood reveal that the 'declarative' (dec) option occurs more frequently than the 'interrogative' (int) and 'imperative' (imp) options. The only imperative option in the passage is found in Sentence 2. The interrogative options are found in Sentences 3, 7, 11 and 12; only one of these, i.e. Sentence 12, further selects the 'modalized' (mod) option from the system of modality. Five of the declarative clauses in the passage select the 'non-modalized' (non-mod) option, **while the remaining two clauses select the modalized option.**

Talking about theme, the thematic item in the passage can be stated thus in the different main clauses:

(i)   **make you no worry for that**
(ii)   zero (You)
(iii)   who
(iv)   Madam, I (Complex Theme)
(v)   **When you see the woman eye begin de flash like ambulance you** (Complex)
(vi)   **But that day when I dey vex ---the same Madam we de grumble** (Complex)
(vii)   zero (It)
(viii) Elewa
(ix)   But why

(x)   Why
(xi)   And if I tell you wetin you
(xii)   Illiteracy

Nine of the above clauses follow the normal 'unmarked' (unmkd) order, while three (Sentences 1, 5 and 6) are marked (mkd). Seven clauses have 'simple' theme (cls ii and vii have zero and partial zero realizations respectively), while five have 'complex' theme (cls iv, v, vi, ix and xi). The development of theme has no single definite pattern: while the 'simple linear' theme is utilized in Sentences 3-4, 6-7 and 11-12, the 'derived' theme is utilized in Sentences 6, 8-9, and the constant theme is utilized in Sentences 9-10 and 10-11.

Cohesion in the text can be described via an illustration below (the features of lexical cohesion will be discussed under lexical meaning):

Table 2: Cohesion in Text A

Types of Cohesion	Features and Location
a. Reference (Situational or Extra – textual)	(i) Nouns: Madam, Elewa, His friend, the oga, That day, etc.
b. Reference (Co-textual)	(ii) Pronouns: I, me, you, we, etc. (i) who (S3) somebody (S4) (ii) you (S7) Elewa (S8) you (S9) (iii) oga (S6) Editor of Gazette (S9) (iv) Editor of Gazette am (S11)
c. Conjunction	But (S6, 9), and (S11) Not to worry because the oga can talk
d. Substitution	Sharp (S6) so (S7)

The occurrence of ambiguity is noted in the use of 'am' under co-textual reference above. In the passage, one finds it difficult to say what 'am' (S11) refers to in the preceding sentence. The word could warrant either of two interpretations, thus:

(i)   --- Wetin you go do with *what I tell you?*
(ii)   --- Wetin you go do with *him* (i.e., Editor of Gazette)?

Note that 'am' in Pidgin English can be used for both animate and inanimate objects.

Lexical Meaning

The features of lexical meaning identified in the passage are classified under five subheadings thus: lexical occurrence, repetition, set and range, collocation and relationships. Some of the lexical items which occur are presented below thus:

a.   Participants
(i) + HUMAN + NEUTER: friend, somebody, oga, Elewa, Editor of Gazette
(ii) + HUMAN + MALE: Man
(iii)+ HUMAN – MALE: Woman, Madam

(iv)+ ANIMATE + CONCRETE: mouth, eye, ambulance, torch, paper, etc.
(v) - ANIMATE- CONCRETE: quarrel, night, time, country, illiteracy, etc.
b.   Process
(i) action – look, pick, make, shut, flash, shine, drive, nod, do, etc.
(ii) cognition – think, know, read,
(iii) reaction – worry, need, vex
(iv) verbalization – said, tell, talk
(v) relation – na
c.   Attribute
(i) +NEUTER – small, same
(ii) + POSITIVE – kind
(iii) – POSITIVE - sharp
d.   Circumstance
+ TIME – day, time, night
+ MANNER – well
+ PLACE – here

The lexical items repeated in the passage are stated as follows:

Madam – 3 times, small – 2 times, quarrel – 3 times, Tell -7 times, man – 2 times, woman – 2 times, day – 2 times

The sets of times which occur in the passage and their ranges are as follows:

Set A	Set B	Set C	Set D
Madam	said	eye	flash
Man	pick	mouth	shut
Woman	worry		
Oga	make		
Editor of Gazette	talk		
Elewa	shine		
	grumble, etc.		

While the different groups above belong to different sets, items under Sets B and C form a range of the items under Set A. Similarly, items under Set D form a range of the items under Set C.

The collocation of items in the passage is non-fixed. Unusual collocations which characterize it include: 'make --- quarrel', 'shine --- torch', 'eye --- flash', 'talk --- sharp', 'tell --- say', 'come --- tell', illiteracy --- read, etc.

Lastly, the three kinds of relationship between items identified in the passage are shown thus:

a.   Synonymy – (i) vex: grumble, worry
                (ii) shine: flash
                (iii) oga; Editor of Gazette
b.   Antonymy – (i) man: woman
                (ii) Madam: oga–
                (iii) sharp: kind

c. Co-hyponymy - (i) said, tell, talk
(ii) gazette, paper

An Analysis of the Linguistic Meaning (Phonology and Graphology)
TEXT B

O ROSE, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,
Has found out thy bed,
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

(William Blake: "The Sick Rose" (*The Penguin Book of English Verse*, p.241)

Phonological Meaning

There are many features of phonology observed in the above poem, which contribute to its meaning. First is the intrusion of irregularity on the seemingly regular features of rhythm in the poem, which might suggest 'intrusion' as part of its meaning. The number of syllables per line is normally between five and six, but there are four syllables in 1.6. Also, there are two feet in each line of the poem (which suggests a dimetre), but in ll. 1 and 7 there are three feet per line (which suggests a trimetre). A further look at the pattern of the feet shows that two patterns consistently occur: the iambic '- 1' and the anapaest '- - 1'. Both patterns occur in ll. 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8, while only one of the patterns occurs in 11.1, 2 and 6. However, it is only in 11.1 and 7 where two stressed syllables co-occur in a line.
The second feature observed is the rhyme scheme of the poem which is 'a b c b, d e f e'. It can be seen that only the second and fourth lines of each stanza have a rhyme, thus ensuring that the rhyming pattern of the poem is neither regular nor irregular. Since rhyming items are usually signposts of meaning in poetry, one can see some meaning expressed by items in the rhyme scheme. For example, a relationship of semantic correspondence (in terms of destructive objects) can be observed between the pair 'worm/storm', while that of semantic contrast is observed between 'joy/destroy'.
Third, there is the use of sound for effect (onomatopoeia) in the items 'howling' and 'crimson' in their respective phrases: 'howling storm' indicates a very strong (destructive) wind with an unpleasant noise, and 'crimson joy' indicates a joy that is as radiant as the crimson colour of a rose.
Lastly, the voiced dental fricative sound / /, which occurs in such words as thou, the, that and they, is found to be repetitive in the poem. The characteristic of this sound as that produced with a continuous release of air from the lungs without any obstruction may suggest vulnerability of the rose to destruction.

Graphological (Orthographic) Meaning

Three major features of graphological meaning are observed in the poem. First are the orthographic features of capitalization. The initial letter of the world 'Rose' is written in a capital form, thus turning the rose flower into a human being. Apart from personifying 'rose', the use of capital letter enhances the vocative function of Rose in the poem since proper names are signposts of vocative meaning.
Apart from the use of capital letter, punctuation marks too are used as devices of meaning in the poem. First, the exclamation mark '!' in line 1 indicates the emotive tone accompanying the utterances 'thou art sick!' Second, the exclamation and full stop provides evidence for the two sentences that make up the poem and consequently the two senses in it:

(i) O Rose, thou art sick!
(ii) The invisible worm --- thy life destroy.

The commas used in 11. 3, 4 and 6 demarcate the extra information given on the senses of the poem. The phrase "In the howling storm" (1.4) gives extra information on the preceding group "in the night" (1.3); the extra information can be removed without it affecting the sense of the second sentence of the poem. Similarly, the sub-sentence in 11. 7 - 8 is seen as an extension of the meaning of the second sentence of the poem; the second sentence can still stand if this added clause is removed. Let us now state the second sentence of the poem after removing the item of extra information from it:

The invisible worm
That flies in the night
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy.

This sentence can thus be seen as giving the reason for the 'sickness of Rose' in the first sentence in 1.1.
From the interpretation above, one might see an anomaly in the orthographic presentation of idea, as the senses are presented in two unequal parts (i.e., number of lines) in the poem. Since there is only one stanza in the poem, one expects that the stanza should express an idea. On the surface, it seems that there are two ideas in the stanza and that each sentence represents an idea However, a closer look will show that the main idea is expressed in l.1 (Sentence 1); the second sentence (ll. 2-8) seems to provide support for the first sentence.

An Analysis of the Contextual Meaning
TEXT C (The lines represent the presentation in the text)

SIDI: (attentive no more. Deeply engrossed in counting
            The beads on her neck)

            Then pay the price.'

LAKUNLE: Ignorant girl, can you not understand? [ii]
            To pay the price would be   5
            To buy a heifer off the market stall. [iii]
            You'd be my chattel, my mere property. [iv]
            No, Sidi! (Very tenderly.)
            When we are wed, you shall not walk or sit
            Tethered, as it were, to my dirtied heels [v]   10
            Together we shall sit at table
            - Not on the floor – [vi] and eat,
            not with fingers, but with knives
            And forks, and breakable plates
            Like civilized beings. [vii]   15
            I will not have you wait on me
            Till I have dined my fill. [viii]
            No wife of mine, no lawful wedded wife
            Shall eat the leavings off my plate – [ix]
            That is for the children. [x]   20
            I want to walk beside you in the street,
            Side by side and arm in arm
            Just like the Lagos couples I have seen
            High-heeled shoes for the lady, red paint
            On her lips. [xi] And her hair is stretched   25
            Like a magazine photo. [xii] I will teach you
            The waltz [xiii] and we'll both Learn the foxtrot [xiv]
            And we'll spend the week-end in night-clubs at Ibadan [xv]
            Oh! I must show you the grandeur of towns [xvi]
            We'll live there if you like or merely pay visits [xvii]   30
            So choose. [xviii] Be a modern wife, [xix] look me in the eye [xx]
            And give me a little kiss- like this. [xxi]
            (Kisses her.)
                    (Wole Soyinka: *The Lion and The Jewel*, pp. 8-9)

Situational meaning

The subject matter of the passage above presents a dialogue between two persons, Sidi and her suitor, Lakunle. One can see Lakunle trying to woo Sidi to become his wife. Lakunle can be seen to have benefited from formal civilization and modernity. He uses his access to formal education as a persuasive device to convince Sidi to embrace him and gain access to civilization. In contrast, Sidi can be seen as an ignorant and simple girl (in Lakunle's view) who still values the traditional norms. In particular, she values the custom of payment of bride price[1] before marriage. Failure to perform this rite is a social anomaly which puts the parties in the ceremony in a bad light before the community.

The relationship of style between the participants in the communication is an informal one, showing intimacy between two lovers. The intimacy is marked by the use of a vocative 'Sidi' in Lakunle's speech, and also by the use of contractives 'you'd' and 'we'll. This is in spite of Lakunle's inclination towards using bombastic and poetic English expressions. The tender tone of Lakunle and his expression of emotions in the passage can also be attributed to this intimate relationship between the participants as well as the subject matter of the communication.

Both Sidi and Lakunle take a turn each in the interaction, but Lakunle's turn dominates the interaction, since he is doing the wooing. Sidi's turn has only one move which gives a directive to Lakunle 'Then pay the price'. In contrast, Lakunle's turn has about six different moves in which he questions (1.4), informs (11.5-7), appeals (11.21-30), directs (11.31-32 and demonstrates (11.32-33). The number of moves made by Lakunle here shows the powerful persuasiveness of his speech.

The mode of the passage is dialogical between two people. The dialogue is fictional since both Lakunle and Sidi are imaginative characters rather than real human beings.

Cognitive meaning

Lakunle attempts to contrast experiences of village life with modern city life, particularly the idea of paying the bride price in the traditional custom. The contrasting experiences are well projected via the occurrences and co-occurrences of lexical items, lexical relationships, lexical repetition and some figurative expressions. The item 'ignorant'(1.4) contrasts with 'civilised' (1.15) and 'modern' (1.31); 'table' (1.11) contrasts with 'floor' (1.12); 'fingers' (1.13) contrasts with 'knives', 'fork' and breakable plates (11.13-14). The set 'chattel' and 'property' (1.7 are associated with 'price' (1.5) and heifer (1.6): these collocate with 'pay' (1.5) and 'buy' (1.6). The items 'finger, knives, forks and breakable plates' (11.13-14) all collocate with 'eat' (1.12). the collocate 'walk or sit tethered---to my dirtied heels' (1.10) contrasts with 'walk beside--- side by side and 'arm by arm' (11.21-22). Meanwhile, there is the repetition of items 'pay', 'price' and 'wife' in the passage.

Lakunle's negative attitude towards the village habits is known via the use of negators before actions, objects and events associated with the village, e.g.:

> ---You shall <u>not</u> walk or sit----
> -<u>Not</u> on the floor
> <u>Not</u> with fingers
> I will <u>**not**</u> have you wait on me----
> <u>No</u> wife of mine---- shall eat the leavings of my plate

The meaning of the passage can be further interpreted from the processes, participants and circumstances expressed by it. Lakunle, for example, wishes to enter into a state of 'wedlock' (1.9) and perform the several actions associated with a wedded couple like sitting together at the table to eat (11.11-12); but he refuses to perform the action of 'paying the bride price' for the marriage. Instead of performing this simple material process, Lakunle indulges in a mental reaction process of 'wanting to walk beside you' (1.21). Following this mental process are physical actions which he intends to perform'; teaching, spending the weekend---, showing, living, etc. Since all these actions are meant to be performed in the future, one can say that Lakunle performs them in his imagination rather than in reality of the text.

Concerning the participants, particularly the human beings, three prominent patterns are observed in the passage; 1st person singular and plural pronouns 'I' and 'We', 2nd person singular pronoun 'you' and 3rd person singular and plural nominals. Lakunle uses 'I' to refer to himself and 'we' to refer to both himself and Sidi; he uses 'you' to refer to Sidi as his addressee; and 'the lady' to refer to people in his imagination. Both Lakunle and Sidi play different participant roles in the message. Very often, Lakunle performs the role of actor while Sidi serves as goal (11.15, 26, 29, etc.); sometimes, both of them serve the role of actor in a non-extended action (11.28 and 30) and senser in a mental process (1.27).

Looking at the circumstantial details given, the place circumstance, which expresses location. appears to be most prominent; e.g., 'at the table', 'on the floor', beside you in the street', 'on her lips' in night-clubs at Ibadan', etc .The major locations in the passage identify experiences in both the village and cities

Social meaning

Two characters interact in the passage, with one playing a more dominant role than the other. Sidi's only turn in the passage is characterised by the command in which she uses an imperative to direct Lakunle to 'play the price'. She has the authority to command Lakunle here, not by virtue of her age or sex, but, by virtue of the circumstantial advantage she has over Lakunle. Ordinarily, she has a lower status than Lakunle's, who, apart from being a male, is more educated and older in age than she. But, since she has the power to answer or reject his proposal, she can command Lakunle in this respect.

It is, however, clear that Lakunle, by virtue of his education, in his very long turn, does not feel inclined to carry out Sidi's directive. Instead, he argues against the girl's request by informing her via a question and series of statements and persuading her via expressions of wishes and promises. After asking an initial question (1.4), Lakunle makes a lot of declarative modalized statements which express futuristic plans (11.4-19) and meaning pertaining to modality.

To pay the price would be --- (hypothetical)
You'd bee ---(hypothetical)
You shall --- (obligatory)
We shall --- (volition)
I will --- (volition)
No wife of mine--- shall--- (obligatory)

Later (11.21-30), Lakunle expresses a wish via declarative modals and undertakes to carry out a series of obligations on Sidi's behalf (11.26-29); both of them will learn, live and stay together. Lastly, he cajoles Sidi and requests her via imperatives to look at him and kiss him.

The potency of Lakunle's argument and persuasion can be seen in the diverse social roles he employs: statements, wishes, promises, requests and pragmatic action of kissing. But whether these roles enable him to achieve his intention, or not, is beyond the content of the passage. His long turn exhibits

breaches (flouts) of all of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, viz. quantity (verbosity), quality (insincerity), relevance (deliberate avoidance of topic) and manner (grandiloquence and evasiveness). He also violates Leech's (1983) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness principles of modesty , tact and agreement by being boastful, wasting Sidi's time and maximizing the expression of disagreement with his interlocutor. His 'bald-on-record' reference to Sidi as an ignorant girl in his opening speech is face threatening and imposing on her. Although Lakunle professes his love for Sidi, he does not love her for what she is, but instead, for what he intends to make of her. It is doubtful if he would tolerate her ignorance if eventually Sidi agrees to his proposal.

Textual meaning

Altogether, there are sixteen sentences in the passage, which consists of twenty-one main clauses. The themes of the clauses are specified below, with subordinate clauses regarded as adjuncts to the main ones.

(i) Then (you), (ii) ignorant girl, can you, (iii) to pay the price, (iv) you
(v) when we are wed you, (vi) together we, (vii) and/we/(ellipsis), (viii) I ,
(ix) No wife, (x) That ,(xi) I ,(xii)And her hair (xiii)I (xiv) and we (xv) and we
(xvi) oh I, (xii) We, (xviii) so(you),(xvix) (you), (xx) (you), (xxi) And (you) (xxii)

It can be seen that the organisation of the clauses above reveals the prominence of the unmarked theme pattern, while the only example of a clause with marked theme is cl. v. The occurrence of this pattern is attributed to the conversational structure of the passage. There are also a mixture of simple and complex thematic patterns and quite a number of the clauses (because they are direct commands) have zero realizations of theme.

Further, the thematic development of the text is achieved mainly via the constant theme' pattern. This is projected mainly by pronouns which denote participants in the conversation: 'You', referring to either Lakunle or Sidi, but mostly to Sidi; 'I' (Lakunle) and We (Lakunle and Sidi).

Coherence is achieved in the passage in two ways. It is achieved by the logical sequence of content-motifs in terms of participants intending to perform physical actions (wedding, walking, sitting at table, eating, teaching, living together, giving a kiss, etc.), mental processes (understand, learn, choose). Also, it is achieved via the natural sequence of turns in the conversation. Two turns are taken one after the other in the passage. The first turn is characterised by the opening move with a direct act, while the second is a challenging move with several micro-acts (inform, wish, promise, request, and pragmatics performance) and macro-act (persuade).

Cohesion is achieved in the passage via several means. The utilization of lexical cohesion can be seen from the discussion of lexical collocation and

relationship under 'cognitive meaning'. A few other cohesive features can be shown thus:

Table 3: Cohesion in Text C

Types of Cohesion	Features and Location
Reference (Situational)	a. Pronouns: You, I, Me and We b. Nouns: Sidi, the Lagos couples, Ibadan, the waltz c. Demonstrative: this (1.32) --- the leavings off my plate (1.19) (1.25) that (1.20)
Reference (Co-textual)	(i) --- the lady (1.24) her hair (1.25) (ii) --- Ibadan (1.28), towns (1.29) there (1.30) (i) And 11.25, 28 and 32 (ii) So (1.31)
Conjunction	(i) And 11.25,28 and 32 (ii) So(1.31)

Rhetorical Features of Meaning

A lot of features of figurative or rhetorical meaning are observed in the passage. Metaphors are observed for example in the statements 'to pay the price would be to buy a heifer----'(11.5-6); 'Oh I must show you the grandeur of towns' (1.29). Similes are observed also in statements like '--- we shall sit at table----- just like civilised being' (11. 11-15); 'I want to walk beside you ----- just like the Lagos couples (11.21-23) '...her hair is stretched like magazine photo (11.25-26). Structural repetition is observed towards the end of the passage (11. 26-30; 31-32), thus:

I will teach you the waltz
And we'll both learn the foxtrot
And we'll spend the weekend---
Oh I must show you---
We'll live there---

Lastly, among several other features, there are repetitions of sounds in the passage. The repetition of the voiceless labio-dental fricative sound /f/ is noticeable in the first half of the passage in words like 'off', floor, finger, forks, fill and wife'. Also, both the voiceless and voiced alveolar fricative sounds /s/ and /z/ are observed in such words as 'stall, Sidi, sit, forks, civilized, heals, knives, beings, etc. And the bilabial semi-vowel /w/ is repeated in words like 'would' when, wed, walk, were, we, with, will, wife, wedded.' It would soon seem that Lakunle finds consonantal continuants and sonorant sounds very pleasant to use to achieve his goal in the conversation.

Intended Meaning (or Message)

A corollary of the previous analysis of theme in this section is the identification of the rhemes of the passage. When the smaller motifs of the rhemes

are interpreted in the light of the situational context of communication and reduced to one central content, we arrive at the intended meaning of the text. We can give this meaning from the viewpoint of Lakunle, the main character, as:

LAKUNLE: I don't want to pay a bride price before marrying you. That would be tantamount to buying you as a slave. I want to marry you as a wife, treasure you, do a lot of things with you as my companion.

Extended meaning

Extension of meaning can occur in the interpretation of the text based on different orientations of experience and ideologies of analysts. For instance, one could make inferences from Sidi's and Lakunle's roles in the passage as follows:
   a. Lakunle is suffering from colonial mentality;
   b. Imposition of modern civilization on village (rural) customs and traditions;
   c. Male chauvinism in an African community.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the ubiquitous nature of meaning in language description and use, this study has shown that the concept can be explained appropriately in terms of different perspectives and types and illustrated with textual data. Both the linguistic and contextual perspectives have been recognized in this study, while different types of meaning have been identified within these perspectives. Some relevant categories of systemic linguistics and contextual features have been applied to analyze literary texts of different genres. Although the analyses were limited to written texts, in this instance, we have gained a lot of insights pertaining to the interpretation of linguistic structure, social conditions and situational factors surrounding the texts. It is thus expected that further analysis of meaning in written and spoken texts from linguistic and contextual perspectives will continue to increase our understanding of diverse discourse of everyday life.

Note

1. The bride price is a token fee which the Yoruba suitor pays as part of the initial rites of a marriage ceremony.

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