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Implicatures and Mediated Discourse: An Analysis of Student-Teacher Interaction on WhatsApp Groups at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

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ABSTRACT:

The study of conversational implicatures is not new; however, its investigation in the context of emerging technologies presents a variety of approaches to the investigation of the manifestations of conversational implicatures in new media, especially social network sites (SNSs). This study sought to establish the use of implicatures in the conversations of lecturers and students on WhatsApp platforms for academic purposes. The objective of this research was to establish the applicability of Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicatures in WhatsApp conversations between students and their lecturers at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Taking cognisance of both its qualitative and quantitative aspects, this study employed a mixed methods research design to interrogate data from WhatsApp interactions. The study population consisted of WhatsApp group conversations derived from WhatsApp groups formed for various classes at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. To derive the study sample, a snowball sampling technique was utilised; one member of a WhatsApp group introduced the rest of group members. Ten WhatsApp group conversations were used as the corpus for this analysis. The analysis and discussion focused on violations of the conversational maxims as set out by Grice (1975) and their relevance to conversational implicature. The findings revealed that the maxims of quantity and those of relevance were principally flouted and there existed particularised and generalised implicatures in the data. The study further reveals that the occurrence of these implicatures was determined by the contextual features of the communicative context in which the conversations were being held. The study concluded that the implicatures in mediated discourse has the same features as those in normal face-to-face conversations; however, the interlocutors are freer to express themselves and there is a constant change of focus in the conversation given the multiple interlocutors on the WhatsApp platform.

 (Keywords: conversational implicature, WhatsApp, mediated discourse, generalised conversational implicatures, particularised conversational implicature, Social Network Sites)

1. Introduction

Advancements in Information Communications Technology (ICT) have greatly influenced the way institutional processes are carried out. The development of the internet and its attendant functions have not only affected the way people relate but also the traditional interactional roles have been greatly affected. One of the most significant influences arises from the use of Social Network Sites (SNSs) which have now become a worldwide phenomenon through which people connect, communicate, and socialise (Camas *et al,* 2021). In the context of universities, SNSs have become commonplace mediums for instructional interaction between educators and students, on and off campus.

These SNSs are defined as online spaces through which people open public or private profiles to provide avenues for interaction with worldwide communities (Caugh & Ruhi, 2018). Moreover, COVID-19 pandemic, which recently disrupted physical operations, presented a challenge for face-to-face communication between lecturers and students to the extent that SNSs became a preferred forum for e-learning. These platforms transcend both time and space and are readily accessible to the majority of students (Wekulo & Brendah, 2023). In the process, these SNSs have significantly altered modes communication between students and lecturers; the traditional ways interaction, including course content sharing, can no longer be sustained.

The concept of conversational implicatures is attributed to Grice (1975). These conversational implicatures occur in the context of a general Cooperative Principle for communication. This principle assumes that when we speak to people, we do so in the context of shared communicative goals, and our interpretation of what is said is based on this context. Rahayu (2016) distinguishes four types of implicature: conventional implicature, conversational implicature, generalised conversational implicature, and specialised conversational implicature. Characteristics such as cancellable, calculable, detachable, conventionally, and particularised are attributed to each of these categories (Grice, 1975). The notion of pragmatics is deployed in uncovering the implicit meaning of utterances.

An implicature refers to the indirect or implicit meaning of an utterance created by the speaker. Implicatures occur when a speaker wishes to express something in a conversation implicitly or indirectly. Grice introduced several kinds of implicature and defined their qualities. Conventional implicatures

refer to implications that are based on the conventional meanings of the words in an utterance. A conventional implicature is independent of context and deals with specific words like 'but,' 'thus,' 'nonetheless,' and 'even.' These conjunctions are used to explain the implicit meaning of specific lexical items or expressions. When a speaker uses the word 'but' between coordinating phrases, he or she is considering a contrast or concession (Levinson, 1983). The conventional implicature uses distinct criteria to determine whether or not an implicature is referenced in the utterance. Conventional implicature is non-cancellable, non-calculable, detachable, conventional, carried out by what is uttered, and determinate (Rahayu, 2016).

A Conversational implicature refers to inferences based on conversational rules and assumptions, rather than linguistic meaning terms in an utterance. Conversational implicature is a well-defined feature. The properties of each form of implicature can be used to distinguish between them. Unlike the traditional implicature, which expresses an agreed meaning from a lexical word, conversational implicature is not organically related to any utterance (Rahayu, 2016). The use of an utterance in context is used to infer conversational implicature. Generalised conversational implicature is one type of conversational implicature; it occurs when the speaker's utterances convey implicit meaning depending on context. Generalised conversational implicature is a type of conversational implicature that is context-specific.

Furthermore, implicature can be described in terms of cooperative principles, which is inferred as a result of a breach of a maxim, commonly a quantity maxim, a quality maxim, a relevance maxim, and a way maxim; however, not everyone adheres to the maxims and we have given examples of these violations in our analysis. Failure to follow the maxims may result in the construction of an implicature. In this scenario, speakers opt not to follow one or more maxims on purpose to generate an implicature. The speaker has an instinctive desire for his or her audience to absorb and discover the underlying meaning behind the utterances when breaching the cooperative maxims. This means that when a speaker violates the maxims, he or she is not intending to deceive, lie, or be uncooperative; rather, he or she is encouraging the audience to seek meaning beyond the semantic level.

Conversations allow a speaker and a listener to share knowledge. Thus, the key rationale for focusing on implicatures and their forms in this paper is to determine how they manifest themselves in the selected interactions between lecturers and students at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Several researches on student-lecturer interactions have been undertaken. It is also clear that there has been minimal research into the implicatures in student-lecturer dialogue, justifying the need for this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study incorporates methods from pragmatics and discourse analysis, as exemplified in Searle's (1969) framework, as well as Grice's (1975) theory of cooperative maxims and implicature. The Speech Act theory was founded by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969), who believes that SAs are the primary units of language communication. Austin and Searle both agree on a crucial trichotomy in how languages are used: (i) locution, which is what a speaker says, (ii) illocution which refers to the verbal accomplishment of what is uttered and (iii) perlocution which is what the hearer acts in reaction to the speech.

The term 'illocutionary act' is closely associated with Searle (1969). It has become a standard practice for researchers to use Searle's interpretation of speech acts. According to Searle, speech acts can be categorised according to their illocutionary goals. Searle's (1969) categorisation is employed in this study since it is comprehensive and suits the data selected for analysis. Searle (1969) distinguished five forms of SAs: assertives, orders, commissives, expressives, and declarations. According to Searle (1985), assertives are claims that describe how things are. Furthermore, he believes that commands are attempts to convince others to do something. Commanding, demanding, ordering, inviting, asking, or suggesting are all ways to achieve this (p. viii). A commissive remark, according to Searle (1999), is fundamentally 'an expression of an intention to do something' (p. 149). According to Searle (1985), expressive are SAs that convey the speaker's mental state and feelings (p. viii). Finally, Searle's (1999) remarks are predicated on an illocutionary force whose goal is 'to bring about a change in the world by describing it as having been changed' (p. 150). The analysis and discussion in this paper rely on these SAs due to their significance in the study and the requirement for data classification. These SAs feature quotes that allude to statements that were not generated by the speakers.

The phenomenon of implicature is propounded by Grice (1975). He defines an implicature as an utterance that transmits meaning beyond its proposition (an utterance's semantic content). When using implicature, an inference can be drawn from what is stated, producing more meaning than what is conveyed (Tillmann, 2008, p. 1). Some characteristics of speech, such as the cooperative principle, are connected to conversational implicature. According to Levinson (1983), specific standards ought to be established to direct the path of conversation (p. 101). Grice (1975) calls them maxims and contends that they constitute the cooperative principle (CP). According to Grice (1975), the CP requires you to 'make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted method.' This remark summarises the four conversational maxims: the quantity maxim, which states that messages should be as informative as necessary for the present purposes of the debate. People should not reveal excessive or insufficient information (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Presenters could want to let the audience understand they are aware of more information, but they are not interested in taking the audience with them. As a result, people say things like, 'Well, to cut a long story short, she didn't get home until two.' The speakers in this scenario adhere to the quantity maxim (Cutting, p.34, 2002). The quality standard thus compels speakers to refrain from saying anything they believe is inaccurate or for which they lack evidence (Grice, 1975, p. 46). Speakers employ certain idioms to highlight that they are just stating what they feel to be true despite the absence of essential evidence.

Because it is ideal for data analysis, this study applies Cutting's (2002) method to the second type of context: background knowledge context. This environment is classified into two types: cultural and interpersonal. The speakers' understanding of the world is concerned with the cultural setting. Sperber and Wilson (1995) suggest that if the participants in the discourse are members of the same group, they should share reciprocal knowledge about

almost everything that the group associates agree on (p. 16). These factors were crucial in characterising implicatures in the setting of mediated conversation, as discussed in this paper.

3. Methodology

This study is a blend of qualitative and quantitative corpuses and adopts the analytical model for the selected data. The study is largely analytical because it adopts an analytical pragmatic approach to identify the occurrence of implicature and qualify these implicatures based on the conversational maxims' non-observance. There are, nonetheless, quantitative aspects arising from use of statistical data from sampled conversations to determine the frequencies of implicatures. All comments posted on WhatsApp groups created by Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) students from January 2023 to April 2023 were included in the research population.

Snowball and purposive sampling were employed in this investigation. Snowball sampling with a distribution that is exponential was employed. The initial participant engaged in the group produces multiple recommendations in exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling. Each recommendation brings the researchers more potential research participants. This geometric chain sampling procedure is repeated until the research has a sufficient number of participants (Creswell, 2012).

We contacted one WhatsApp group administrator, who then linked us to another group administrator, and the procedure was repeated until we acquired six groups that deemed adequate data for study analysis. We requested the group administrators to notify the other members of the groups about the rationale for our inclusion in their groups. Consequently, the researcher chose texts that exhibited implicature as well as grammatical traits that define university students' social media conversation.

Data for this study were collected through passive participation as we were members of the chat group. We intended to collect a total of ten conversations from each of the three groups that we joined. Since the occurrence of implicatures is unpredictable, a large corpus is required so that it can be sieved and the conversations with implicature emerge in a quantity that is useful for this study; however, the limit to ten conversations was necessary to avoid an extremely large quantity of data that would be cumbersome for us to analyse and discuss exhaustively.

Data analysis took a three-step process. First, the collected data was sieved to identify the data that presents traces of implicature. To achieve this, we annotated the text. Annotation, according to Hasco (2012), involves the addition of interpretative linguistic information to a corpus. In the context of the present study, tagging was used to identify the evidence of conversational or conventional implicature in the selected conversational texts. The disaggregated data were then classified using the developed coding, as well as Searle's classification of SAs and Grice's theory of conversational maxims and implicature.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This study sought to establish the presence and use of conversational implicatures in WhatsApp conversations between lecturers and students at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). In this chapter, the study presents an analysis of the data that was collected. Excerpts from the data sets that were collected have been presented here and the discussions are centred on the principles of conversational maxims and the tenets of particularised and generalised implicatures.

After conducting the analysis, we found eleven (11) data sets containing conversational implicatures on WhatsApp conversations between lecturers and their students. The data were identified and classified based on the types of conversational implicatures using Grice's theory of conversational implicatures. Six data sets contained generalised conversational implicatures, and five data sets contained particularised conversational implicatures. The following table summarises the types of conversational implicatures found in the selected WhatsApp conversations:

TABLE 1: TYPES OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES

No	Utterances	Implicatures	Types of Conversational Implicatures	
			PCI	GCI
1.	OK Dr.	I have seen the link you shared	☑	
2.	Please!	Kindly share the schedule with us again. Some of us just got added to the wall and don't have the previous programs		☑
3.	Praying that electricity is back by that time!	There was a power blackout since early that day.		☑
4.	I was off-line since Tuesday evening	The speaker would like sister Norine to give details of what was posted on the wall.	☑	
5.	Noted	The task was submitted (in hard copy) the day you sit for the respective exams.		☑
6.	Thanks for this	Did not remember that team ALE 504 had a class today		☑

7.	Do we remember today's class with Sr?	Completely unaware that there is a class	☑	
8	Personally, I really need to wake up because I've been procrastinated way too much. I'll do something soonest Dr.	I have not been very keen or attentive previously.	☑	
9	Please remember that we have our departmental defence this coming Thursday 10/3/2022.	Suggesting that the postponed defences do not affect this particular departmental defence schedule		☑
10	Procrastination has killed many of us. We could be in this list.	Many of us have missed out on the graduation list because of failure to prepare on time for defence.		☑
11	Who has the thesis format?	I want to present but I don't know the thesis format for presentation.	☑	

GCI: Generalised Conversational Implicatures

PCI: Particularised Conversational Implicatures

This study investigated the presence and choice of conversational implicatures used by lecturers and students on WhatsApp groups formed by the class to specifically interact on academic issues. The conversation threads used both informal and formal English. The researcher was able to identify both individualised and generalised conversational implicature. General conversational implicature is the form of implicature in which the listener does not require specialised expertise to understand the message because the circumstance is common. According to Saragi (2011), generalised conversational implicature refers to flouted utterances that listeners can immediately understand without any special contextual analysis needed. Similarly, generalised conversational implicature occurs when the hearer does not need any special knowledge to estimate the conveyed meaning (Al, 2020).

Generalised Conversational Implicature

The concept of conversational Implicature refers to the knowledge of interlocutors in a communicative event where speaker and the listener understand that their utterances to each other comply with all rules (Yule, 1996). Yule (1996) presents two types of conversational implicature: generalised conversational implicature (GCI) and particularised conversational implicature (PCI). The analysis first identified generalised implicatures. According to Yule (1996), a generalised conversational implicature is rendered by saying something that is inferable without reference to features of the context (Yule, 1996). In this case, GI occurs where certain forms of words in an utterance refer to a general context rather than a specific one. This is exemplified in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1

A: Did you sent our names to (lecturers name) may you ask her the day when we shall our class or is she going to maintain Thursday as we agreed

B: Hey .... I talked to (lecturers name) and she said she will get back to me asap

A: Okey thanks

In the conversation above, conversant B's response to A presupposes knowledge of the context in which the first conversant posed the question. Conversant B's response is in reference to the second part of A's question where he wanted to know if the lecturer was going to maintain Thursday as the day for class. This corroborates the assertion by Yule (1996) that generalised conversational Implicature is generated by saying something that is inferable without reference a feature of the context. In other words, special background knowledge or inferences are not required in calculating the additional conveyed meaning.

A further examination of the conversation reveals a pragmatic aspect that is realised in the flouting of the maxim of relation by conversant B. in conversant B's response, we notice that they do not respond directly to the inquisition made by conversant A. Conversant A needed to know whether or not B had sent their names to the lecturer. While the implicature in this excerpt can be construed to imply acceptance by B that they sent the names but the lecturer had not made any comment on it; however, inferring from the context of the conversation, A asks two questions in one statement. Perhaps it is this multiplicity in the question that provides B with the option to give the response that they give. However, when B says '*she said she will get back to me asap,*' it is not clear whether the lecturer would address the names or the scheduled class on Thursday. In light of this finding, the conversant B violates the maxim of quantity. According to Grice (1975) flouting a maxim entails an overt or obvious attempt by the conversant to break a maxim. Violating a maxim entails the conversant covertly braking a maxim. In the case of conversant B, we notice the covert attempt to break the maxim of quantity by refusing to directly address the information sought by conversant A.

Excerpt 2

The researcher took this extract from the first observation on Wednesday, March, 2nd, 2023, in the WhatsApp group, namely ALE 504. The researcher copy-pasted the chat from the WhatsApp group. In this chat, the students were conflicted about the class being offered for ALE 504.

A: Join the class... sister is waiting

B: Good afternoon... those taking ALE 504 sister is requesting if we can have our class in the evening

C: At what time are you suggesting we should start the class?

B: We will have our class today at 7 pm

C: Noted with thanks

In the conversation above, there are significant conflicts in the way meaning is construed by the conversants. Student A seems to already have joined a class by Sister. However, student B seems to suggest that the class has been postponed and Sister was requesting for it to be held in the evening. Evidently, student B violates the maxim of relevance. While student A was asking the other students to join the class, student B was actually referring to a different lesson altogether. Student B's response does not derive from the immediate context envisaged by Student A. It can be further construed that, perhaps, student A was referring to a different lesson altogether. However, given that the WhatsApp group was meant for students taking ALE 504, we can conjecture that the conversational maxim of relevance had been flouted in this instance. This kind of utterance can be categorised as particularised conversational implicature, which according to Grice (1975), can be said that people need specific context to understand the particularized conversational implicatures.

I1 *Particularised Conversational Implicature*

Unlike the generalised conversational implicature which does not require the existence of a special context, this study demonstrates that understanding the existence of particularised conversational implicature requires the establishment of a special context. To solicit this implicature from the data, the researcher examined the following extract from the data:

Excerpt 3

A: Good morning to you Dr.

Personally, I really need to wake up because I have procrastinated this for way too long. I'll do something soonest Dr. Thank you.

B: Thanks Mary and Tom for your responses. Please let's create some time to ensure we finish and graduate in good time. I understand it might not be easy because of time but any good thing doesn't come easy. Let's make sacrifices, especially with time to work towards graduating next year. All the best as we strive to make our dreams come true. We are here as supervisors to help attain the dream.

C: Good Morning Doc. Kindly asking, are presentations still on. Am trying to join but the message am getting is that I will join when someone lets me in.

A: Thank you

C: Much appreciated

D: Thank you for sharing this Doc. However, in Literature we were told we will be using MLA format. Kindly let us know if this has changed.

The excerpt above presents a conversation between the lecturer and his students. In this excerpt, we notice a violation of the maxim of relation. The relation maxim requires one to be relevant when they participate in communication, according to Grice (1975). Grice presents this maxim as an explanation for a certain sort of regularity in conversational behaviour in terms of the value of information supplied at each turn of a discussion.

In this excerpt, student B comments: 'Good Morning Doc. Kindly asking, are presentations still on. Am trying to join but the message am getting is that I will join when someone lets me in.' Clearly, this remark does not follow from the preceding comment made by the lecturer in which he passionately appeals to the students to put more effort to complete their work. Student B disregards the intended meaning of the comment by the lecturer and introduces information that is not relevant to the meaning construed from the lecturer's comment.

The implicature in this case is a relevance implicature. A relevance implicature is a conversational implicature based on an addressee's assumption about whether a speaker is adhering to or breaking the relational or relevance principle. The addressee develops a typical implicature if it is thought that the speaker is following the maxim. In this case, therefore, student B's comment shows the presence of a particularised implicature borne out of her comment that violates the conversational maxim of relevance.

Excerpt 4

A: Hello Teammates, for those keen on decolonization studies, here is a sumptuous read. Enjoy!

*B: **Merci beaucoup** bro. **Mbuya muno! Orio muno lukali omwami** (Thank you very much, brother). At least I know some little Luhya you see. **Aluta continua.***

A: Waaa. Great to hear. The profound wealth of our native languages

In excerpt 4, we notice the use of code mixing in the conversation between student A and B. Student B uses French, Ekegusii, and Luhya: '*Merci beaucoup bro. Mbuya muno*! *Orio muno lukali omwami* (Thank you very much brother. At least I know some little Luhya you see. Aluta continua).' This is a response to the comment made by student A. While the concept of code-switching and code-mixing in conversational discourse is commonplace in multilingual contexts, its use in the context of the WhatsApp conversations in this study raises a number of issues.

First, Student B compels the interlocutor to engage in the principle of cooperative conversation even when Student B has used information that is not elicited by Student A's comment. Morana & Maedche (2017) assert that interlocutors in communication often necessitate cooperation to get anything they intend in the conversation. The assumption in such cases is for the informant to be consistent and informational. In the context of excerpt 4, student B does not seem to advance any informational content that is consistent with the comment made by student A. In this case, the maxim of quantity is violated while engaging in this particularised implicature. In the excerpt 4, conversant B brings into the conversation information that is not only irrelevant but also unsolicited by conversant A. This inter-sentential code-switching violates the maxim of relevance and corroborates the assertion by Prasetya (2020) that code-mixing insertion can be understood as 'generally borrowing by inserting a lexical category or foreign phrase into a particular structure.' Consequently, 'the violation of the maxim of relevance occurs when a speaker's speech information is not aligned and commensurate with its question' (Prasetya, 2020, p. 33).

5. Conclusion

This study sought to determine the types of conversational implicatures inherent in the WhatsApp conversations between lecturers and students at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Kenya. Evidently, learning institutions in Kenya, like the rest of the world, are leveraging technology to facilitate virtual teacher-learner interactions. As demonstrated in this paper, these platforms have provided rich language resources that can be utilised in contemporary research in applied linguistics. The study established that there existed conversational implicatures in the selected conversations. Particularised conversational implicatures were more frequent than generalised implicatures. Moreover, these implicatures emanated directly from the conversational context of the interlocution. In most cases, the interlocutors were found to violate conversational maxims of quantity or relevance. These findings demonstrate that mediated interactions, especially those that are largely informal, are context-specific.

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