

**DRAMATIC IMPLICATURE AS AN ALTERNATIVE IN THE  
NIGERIAN HOME VIDEO**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine how implicature could serve as an alternative technique in the presentation of actions in the Nigerian home video. The social responsibilities of art in the society have been variously advanced by scholars. From the role of the artist as a social crusader, a revolutionary, a teacher, the conscience of the people etc., the artist is seen as a very important player in the protection of the values of his society. In Nigeria, and with particular reference to the home video, the instrumental values of art have been on close examination by critics. While some advance its positive impacts, others emphasise the negative. Proponents of the latter posit that the home video has helped in promoting prostitution, kidnapping, ritual killing, secret cult activities and other anti-social behaviours, especially, among children and adolescents. The argument is premised on the proposition that children and adolescents who watch movies that contain such anti-social scenes often have great urge and propensity to put them into practice. This paper, therefore, proposes the use of implicature as an alternative mode of presenting such scenes. Its submission is that in as much as drama aims at presenting action in a manner that suspends disbelief, the role of art in the promotion of the moral values of the society cannot be jettisoned. As such, any technique that could be adopted as a balance to the two sides should be encouraged.

**Key words: implicature, alternative, Nigerian, home video**

**Introduction**

The responsibility of the artist to the society has been variously advanced. An artist is seen as an entertainer, a teacher, social crusader, revolutionary, protector of the mores and values of the society, as well as the conscience of his people. As an entertainer, an artist could apply any media, ranging from the ridiculous to the fabulous. As a teacher or educator, he can adopt both the realistic and unrealistic, the eulogy and the satiric, as well as the allegorical instruments.

With particular reference to the Nigerian society and the literary art, the significant role of art in promoting the values and culture of the people has not been undervalued. From the earliest prose of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprain Ekwensi; the plays of J.P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, and the poems of Christopher Okigbo, to the present-day, literary artists in Nigeria have continued to explore the instrumental possibilities of the different genres of literary art to showcase the mores and values, culture and tradition of the people; satirise the vices in the society; advance revolutionary paths; as well as entertain the readers.

Angling from the dramatic genre, the boom in the home video industry, especially from the early 1990s has also played a very significant role in the advancement of these crucial roles. Thus, it is the socio-cultural role of the home video in Nigeria that derives the focus of this paper.

Arguments are rife as to how the boom in the home video industry has influenced the Nigerian society. While some strongly advance the positive impacts, others have emphasised the negative. One pertinent argument advanced by the latter group is the negative influence and orientation of home video on the children, adolescents and youths. From the ambience of the dramatization of issues such as ritual killing, secret cult activities, prostitution, kidnapping and armed robbery, these scholars interrogate the role of the industry in carving a conscience for the youths of the nation. Undoubtedly, such scenes could be appraised from their satiric motives and value.

However, critics of the anti-moral impacts of such scenes attribute the recent surge in secret cult activities even at the primary school level, the incessant cases of kidnapping and other social vices that bedevil the Nigerian nation to the exposure of children and adolescent to such scenes in home videos.

The thrust of this paper is, therefore, to proffer implicature as a viable alternative to the raw performance of such scenes which have been perceived as anti-moral and anti-social. The submission of the paper is that by adopting implicature, the child would be protected from hard-core exposure to such perceived anti-moral and anti-social scenes, and the make believe feature of the play would also not suffer severe erosion.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Some basic concepts against which the thrust of this paper is built require explication. They include implicature and home video. The essence of the brief review is to properly contextualise them within the focus of the paper.

**Implicature:** Implicature according to Mey “is derived from the verb ‘to imply’ as its cognate implication” (45). It is one of the principles in Pragmatics used in interpreting conversations. Its major proponent is H.P. Grice. Fowler states that “the term implicature is used by Grice (1975) to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinct from what the speaker literally says” (31). Citing Mey further, “a conversational implicature is, therefore, something which is implied in conversation; that is something which is left implicit in actual language use” (45). Grice had argued that in conversations, interlocutors share implicit understanding to cooperate and obey certain maxims for mutual understanding. It is against this implicit understanding that meaning interpretations are hinged. The maxims according to him include: quantity, quality, relevance and manner. However, such maxims are sometimes flouted, broken or disobeyed, thereby communicating extra meaning from what the conversation explicitly expresses.

The maxim of quantity expects that every conversationalist should provide sufficient, but not too much, information needed in any conversation. The maxim of quality requires that the information must be truthful to the intention of the conversation. The maxim of relevance expects that information must be relevant to the topic of the conversation. The maxim of

manner requires that the conversationalist must not be obscure or ambiguous in providing the information.

When interlocutors intentionally break any or some of these maxims, they give more information or less information than required; introduce an idea that is supposedly outside the thrust of the conversation; or give information in a manner that it may not be clear. Such intentional violation usually introduces further meaning into the conversation. As such, the concept of implicature suggests that meaning in a conversation may lie in what is not said (but implied in any of the violations) instead of what is overtly said.

Implicature, therefore, refers to a technique of interpreting meaning by what an interlocutor implies through apparent breaking of any of the cooperative maxims. It operates against the background of what a listener expects from a speaker; that he or she would tell the truth, would say what relates to the topic and make his contribution in a manner that would be understandable. According to Saeed, “these are assumptions the listener starts out with; any or all may be wrong, and he may realize this or not, but this is a kind of baseline for talking” (214). The baseline of implicature is that a conversation may not necessarily break down when these assumptions and expectations are not met. Rather, it is possible to try to make sense of conversations which appear to deviate from them. We do this by making inferences without relying on explicitly stated messages.

The argument behind implicature is that Grice’s four maxims cannot be read and obeyed as sacrosanct and canonical rules. Conversationalists often indulge in probing into the extra meaning communicated through a violation and not obedience to the maxims. A good case here is in the use of figurative expressions such as irony and metaphor, euphemism and hyperbole. These should have been literally unacceptable, having broken the maxims of quality and quantity respectively. But for the fact that the listener would want to know why the expected maxims have been broken leads to the decoding of their meanings. Thus, figures of speech are said to communicate by indirect expression. Consider the following expressions:

- i. Adaobi is a vulture. (metaphor)
- ii. Adaobi’s room is dirtier than a refuse dump. (hyperbole)
- iii. She is very intelligent, having scored zero in all her exams. (irony)

Sentence (i) is acceptable as a metaphor but it has not told the truth (maxim of quality). Adaobi is a human being and couldn’t have been a bird. In sentence (ii), Adaobi’s room couldn’t have been dirtier than a refuse dump in the literal sense; in sentence (iii), someone who scored zero in every exam couldn’t have been intelligent. So the meanings of the sentences do not reside in their truth value. Their meanings are implied, indirectly expressed.

Obviously, the major feature of literature is creativity which manifests in the manner of language, and the structuring of the events and episodes in the text. Citing Leech in his description of a poet as a creative writer, “...and since language is his medium, one might well ask how he could be creative without using language in some sense creatively” (23). No doubt Leech’s reference to creativity in language is not limited to poetry but extends to both drama and prose. Creativity often comes from deviation from the regular pattern, which creates novelty and attracts significance. In this regard, Short writes that “when authors invent deviant structures they choose structures which are outside the bounds of some norm-system,, which, very often, is the system of rules provided...” (68).

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the concept of implicature could be creatively approximated into drama; essentially, how it can be relevant in the presentation of anti-social scenes in the Nigerian home video. So far, the discussions show that implicature is a conversational technique hence the likely question could be how it can be approximated into a dramatic technique.

Implicature could be analogously considered in dramatic performance where the audience expects an actor to observe absolute fidelity to his assigned role. An actor having taken up a role, assumptions are generated in the minds of the audience about the expected actions according to the demands of a scene. Grice's maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner are all built into these assumptions. An actor's action is expected to be true to his role, nothing more or less; it should be in a manner that is relevant to the thrust of the play. No doubt, suspension of disbelief is a necessary index of any dramatic performance. The audience should be seen as watching an action and not what looks like the action. Thus, the actor should neither over-perform nor under-perform according to the expectations of his or her role.

The contention of the paper is that, just as in speech where meaning might be implicated in what is not said instead of what is said, in drama, meaning could also be implicated in what is not performed instead of what is performed. This is what this paper calls dramatic or performance implicature. *Over-performance* or *under-performance* of an action, for instance, is capable of eliciting deeper interpretations from the audience. When a in a play, the audience fails to see actions they expect, they are left with possibilities of inferring meanings. In the same vein, when an actor takes an action beyond the naturally expected level, it creates opportunities for extra meanings. Therefore, examining the extent to which implicature could assist in reducing the cases of anti-social scenes in the Nigerian home video forms the prime thrust of the paper.

**Home Video in Nigeria:** Discussions on home video in Nigeria are usually tied to the Nollywood, a name which designates the contemporary movie industry in Nigeria, and coined in the manner of Hollywood of America and Bollywood of India. Notably, prior to the evolution of the Nollywood industry, film tradition had come a long way in Nigeria. Film tradition in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period when it existed as cinema, which first arrived in the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as peephole viewing or motion picture devices. This was later replaced with improved motion picture exhibition devices and the first film in Nigeria was screened at the Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos from 12- 22 August, 1903. During this period, the films were screened with foreign actors taking the speaking roles, and few Nigerian actors in non-speaking roles. The first film to feature Nigerian actors in speaking roles was entitled *Palmer*, and it was produced in 1926 by Geoffery Barkes. Again, the first film entirely copyrighted to the Nigerian film unit was entitled *Fincho*, produced in 1957 by Zebba ([http://wiki/cinema of Nigeria](http://wiki/cinema_of_Nigeria)).

With the attainment of independence in 1960, the sector witnessed new entrants such as Hubert Ogunde, Moses Olaiya, Ola Balogun and this gave it a remarkable boost. But it was the Indigenization Decree of 1972, promulgated by the then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, that actually performed a more significant magic. The Decree brought in the transfer of greater percentage of the film theatres, hitherto monopolised by foreigners, to Nigerians.

With this, more Nigerian film producers and actors began to emerge, although not without some teething problems. By the 1980's, Nigerians had started experiencing significant economic powers, people had begun to own private televisions, States had started establishing television stations that televised drama series. These negatively affected the cinema theatre business, as people could now enjoy viewing the films in the comfort of their rooms. Wale Adenuga's *Papa Ajasco* which was first produced in 1984 marked a major milestone in this regard.

The most remarkable breakthrough that blossomed the Nollywood industry in Nigeria was recorded in 1992 with the direct-to-video film (home video) entitled *Living in Bondage* produced by Ken Nebue. This film is remarkable in several ways. It was the first direct-to-video film to receive such promotion and market in Nigeria. Again, it created and exposed an assemblage of young and talented Nigerian actors. Similarly, it exposed young Nigerians to the opportunity of professional film acting; the economic and social opportunities associated with it. No doubt, today, film acting and film production are parts of the largest employment sectors in Nigeria. Furthermore, it helped to expand the vista of themes and subjects that could be explored, as today, virtually all aspects of life in the country and beyond form parts of the thematic explorations of the Nigerian home video.

Apart from the ones identified above, several other benefits have been identified with the blossoming of the home video in Nigeria: economic empowerment, recording, expression and transmission of socio-cultural norms and values, creation and promotion of tourism by highlighting remarkable tourist flashpoints, promotion of the use of indigenous languages and so on. Overwhelmingly, the home video films have helped to project Nigeria (her culture, dress, religion, language etc.) internationally, contributing significantly to the growth of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

However, in the face of all these thrilling benefits, the home video in the country has been grossly criticised. Among the myriads of negative opinions is that it has promoted anti-social values. Advocates of the negative opinions argue that the home video has played significant role in popularising social vices. For instance, there is the argument that a good number of people do not differentiate between on-the-screen and off-the-screen characters, thus such viewers erroneously believe that the nude display by some female actors; the acquisition of wealth through prostitution, armed robbery, murder, ritual killing, kidnapping etc. are natural behaviours and normal ways of life. Others also believe that recruitment of gangsters or other forms of violence are the best options in settling disputes and misunderstanding. Aiyegbusi as an instance has lamented that "I have been fortunate to be outside this country where people were talking about Nigerian movies. The impression is that all our movies are targeted at witches, nudity, bad mothers-in-law, 419, rituals, money rituals and all sorts of negative things" ([http://wiki/cinema of Nigeria](http://wiki/cinema_of_Nigeria)). Such opinion as this puts to question the impact of the home video in the formation of the youths of the nation and the manner of representation it gives to the country before the international community. This paper, therefore, examines the possibility of dramatic implicature as an alternative to the raw dramatization of the perceived negative scenes.

### **Methodology**

The scope of the paper is limited to a discussion of implicature as a plausible alternative technique to the raw dramatization of what most critics of the Nigerian home video have

identified as a source of promoting anti-moral conscience in the society. The method adopted in the collection of its data is personal observation by watching Nigerian home videos. The method of analysis is descriptive. The researchers rely on existing literature for the explication of the basic concepts. The propositions and assertions of scholars are applied in critically examining the culture of video play in Nigeria. To ensure neutrality, no reference is made to any particular film either patronizingly or adversely. Rather, data discussed are such issues, as rape and assassination that could be found in most home video plays in Nigeria, which the paper considers as within the frame of anti-social implications.

### **Discussion**

This paper subscribes to the general notion that drama is basically action. By this nature, drama has the advantage of multi-modal technique. From the speeches of the actors in the forms of dialogue, monologue, soliloquy and aside, to the costume of the actors, their action, as well as the technology of directing and stage presentation, the playwright, the director, and film the producer have various media of expressing the message of a play. Also, for the fact that drama appeals to different senses at the same time, it has the advantage of immediate and longer lasting impact on its audience. This is unlike the prose that relies on fluid narrative, or poetry that relies heavily on imagery and sound.

Again, drama has stronger potential of suspending disbelief. Its ability to evoke catharsis, especially in tragic scenes, is a testimony to this assertion. It is not usually difficult for well scripted plays to emotionally drag its audience into its events, so much so that, sometimes, the audience would forget that they are faced with fiction. This is where the danger lies especially with the adolescent audience who may not easily differentiate between the factual and the fictional aspects of the play. Among this group, believing the actor(s) and the urge to imitate them is usually high. For the fact that the audience may not always differentiate between on-the-screen performance and off-the-screen performance in a play, an actor could be hated, loved, derided in real life because of his or her roles in a performance. Similarly, an actor may become a role model to some people based on what he/she does on screen.

In consideration of the affective role of home video on its audience in this regard, the Nigerian film censors board introduced the policy of film rating. While some films are rated X (strictly for adult viewing) some are rated 16 (for those that are 16 years and above) 18 (for 18 years and above) etc. But the extent of enforcing this policy cannot be ascertained. There is no denying the fact that children and adolescents still watch even X-rated films. Even where some parents tend to be strict, some of these children secretly buy or rent the film plates and watch them when their parents and guardian are out of the home. Again, some cable channels show some of these films. Although they first advise the discretion of the viewers before showing the films, there is no assurance that such advice is heeded by the viewers.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that some film producers have been adopting the elliptic technique to check the voicing of certain expressions they perceive as immoral, erotic and negatively affective. But this affects only the speech aspect of the films. What happens to the action aspect which is central to drama? This forms the problem for this paper. If the film producers have realised the need for the elliptic technique in language, they should as well consider the need for a similar technique for action in a play. This forms the purpose of the paper, to proffer a technique for achieving this.

### **Implicature as an Alternative Technique in the Nigerian Home Video**

The paper has examined implicature as a conversational technique that expresses meaning from what is not said instead of what is said. It has also argued that this could be approximated into a dramatic technique that communicates message from an action that is not performed instead of that which is performed. This is what this paper refers to as dramatic implicature. It is ideal to illustrate how this could be applied. This is done by imagining possible dramatic scenes in the Nigerian home video.

**Scene I: A lady is seen sitting in bed sobbing. She covers herself with a part of the bedcover, clutching unto a pillow. Then there is a young man who is seen adjusting his trousers in front of her, putting up a face of aggression. No overt action of love making is performed.**

In this scene, the viewers are spared from the unsavory pornographic scene of love making. The purpose of the scene, no doubt, is to expose the risk and dangers associated with rape and not to teach the viewer how to rape a lady or how to make love. The action of love making is implied by the scene, but what are overtly performed are the effects and consequences of the action. In the scene, less than the quantity of information expected by the viewer has been given to him/her, but this does not impede the conveyance and decoding of the message.

**Scene II: Some boys are seen discussing with a man on how to assassinate another man. Subsequently in the film, the target for the assassination is seen lying dead along the path to the farm. The activities of assassination are not acted.**

In this scene, the viewers have been saved from the gory scene of wielding dangerous weapons of assassination such as club, gun, cutlass etc. They are spared the process of hatchet and the painful and fruitless struggle of the victim in an attempt to survive. A child who watches this film would learn the possibility of someone being assassinated as a result of quarrel, misunderstanding, envy, avarice etc. but he/she is spared of exposure to how the action is carried out. No doubt, the major intention of the scene is to expose the dangers of misunderstanding and treachery and not to teach the viewer how to carry out the act of assassination. Although less than the quantity of information expected by the viewer is supplied, the message is conveyed.

The possible effects of violent movies, for instance, are that they make children have less empathy, believe in solving problems through aggression, etc. But violence is one part of human life that cannot be wished away. Most often, in drama and other literary genres, events of violence are introduced to be satirised. However, the argument of this paper is that it is not compulsory that explicit content of such scenes must be captured. Sometimes, they are better implied.

Furthermore, the paper had earlier admitted the importance of fidelity in drama. Action should be true to life, in the manner that costume is fitting to role and occasion. However breaking the maxim of quantity in this regard, especially, in playing the role of a lady of easy virtue, the paper posits that rather than *over-dressing* for the role (thereby giving more than the needed information), the same maxim could be broken by *under-dressing* (giving less information). Oral discussion of the actions in this regard may not be as permeating as visual

presentation of near nudity. Thus, dramatic implicature breaks the maxim of quantity by presenting less action than the expectations of the audience.

One notable thing about conversational implicature is that it requires certain level of knowledge and communication efficiency to be interpreted. In the same manner, in dramatic implicature, a child who is watching any of the scenes discussed here may likely not be able to decode the implied interpretations, unlike where he or she is directly exposed to the scene of a lady struggling, screaming and wriggling, with a man on top of her; or the man in the assassination scene being clubbed down or stabbed to death or shot with a gun. These are actions capable of negatively affecting the psyche of the audience.

Dramatic implicature is relevant since in drama, communication of literary messages is not done only through language. The actors also communicate with their audience through action. Whether as speech or action, proper contextualization is necessary. The case of dramatic irony, which is a more popular dramatic technique, is instructive here. In dramatic irony, there is a possibility of an actor doing one thing on stage and the audience giving it a different interpretation. In such circumstance, two relevant contexts exist: the context of the actor and that of the audience, with each generating meanings. What this suggests is that it is not only the action that produces meaning, the context is very essential. A playwright or film producer relies extensively on context to create dramatic scenes. Thus, it is important to note that proper context is required for dramatic implicature to be possible.

### Conclusion

The paper has examined the possibility of implicature as a technique in the presentation of supposed anti-social scenes in the Nigerian home video. The need is against the background that literary creation of all genres performs different functions in the society, one of which is shaping the consciousness of the people. In consideration of the fact that children and adolescents are susceptible to influences from the type of drama that they watch or the type of books that they read, it becomes imperative to mould such works in a manner that their positive influences would outweigh their negative influences. By adopting the technique of dramatic implicature which allows one to infer meaning from what is not performed, the children and adolescents could be shielded from exposure to scenes that a playwright or film producer may deem immoral or anti-social.

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