

## Habit of Thought and the Use of Figurative Expressions in Communication

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the habit of thought and the use of figurative expressions in both written and spoken communication for active human involvement. Using Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence for this study, Chomsky (1965) maintains that "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a complete homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristics) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. What we speak reflects our habit of thought to the listener. The proper use of a language with literary flair equips the speaker with genuine wit, and the use of language as a means of communication in integrity and self-worth. The use of puns shows brilliance, and this is very possible. It is through figurative expression that one shows wit and overwhelms the audience with "finery. In this case, the English language mixes and mingles with literature in the production of thoughts, and it is the most effective, if not the only, muted medium in which knowledge is transmitted in higher institutions.*

**Keywords:** Active human involvement, habit of thought, figurative expressions, written and spoken communications

### INTRODUCTION

The existence of man with another incorporates interactions. By interaction, we mean communication. Alder and Rodman (2003) say that communication refers to the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behaviour of other persons. Alban Jnr. (2012) opined that communication is the transmission of meaningful information from one person or group of persons (the sender) to another person (the recipient) in a way that generates shared attitudes, values, beliefs, feelings, or

behaviours between the sender and the recipient. DeVitto (2014) says human communication occurs when a person sends and receives messages that are distorted by noise, occur within a context, have an effect, and provide an opportunity for feedback.

Communication is a reciprocated action or influence between two sources, entities, and persons. It is an influential relationship in a sense. Interaction is symbiotic in many fields, including computing, physical, social, ecological, and communication. Interaction could be dynamic or static. The context in which interaction is discussed is in the human communicative context. Through this process, information is encoded from the source and decoded by the recipient of such code. The non-verbal mode of communication uses semiotics, signs, symbols, and inscriptions; at the literary level, one could add mine. Besides paralinguistic attempts, surface marks can also be used to transfer information between both ends. Writing is a permanent form of communication reaching a wider audience. The common mode of communication is oral or verbal. This is very ephemeral, especially when it is not captured with a recording device. This paper examines both written and spoken aspects of communication for active human involvement.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Using Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence for this study, Chomsky (1965) maintains that "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristics) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (Albnan Jnr. 2008). Chomsky's thought means that at least an average speaker of a language who claims competence in such language within his/her speech community should learn and understand such language to the point of not making mistakes and blaming such mistakes on what Chomsky called "irrelevant conditions. One of such irrelevant conditions includes speaking the language with a lack of interest in it and making errors. This means that speakers of language should be interested in it, knowing how to use it without error when it comes to practical usage.

It is the actual use of language after learning that calls for Chomsky's "competence" and performance. Chomsky (1965) says competence is the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language and performance is the use of language in concrete situations. This is what Ferdinand De Saussure calls *Langue* and *Parole*. It is when there is a lack of mastery of the rules of language and proper use of it that will indicate Chomsky's false starts. Chomsky says the child learning the language, is to determine

from the data performance the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker-hearer and that he puts to use in actual performance. At the level of speech, Chomsky says our utterances must have to be “acceptable” referring to utterances that are perfectly natural and immediately comprehensible without paper-and-pencil analysis.

### **Language and Learning**

How did man come by language? Many have attempted to postulate the origin of language from different points. We will reduce our stand to Yule (2010), who postulated that the origin of language must have dated back many years ago and as far back as between ...1000,000 and 50,000 years ago, well before written language (about 5,000 years ago). Since man cannot have evidence of past written language, Yule traced the origin of language to many sources. Yule follows the order of validity as he puts across the Divine origin. Language is said to have originated from God when Adam (Genesis 1) was communicating with God as he participated in naming objects created by God. The subsequent divine source is that of the Hindu religion. Language emanates from Sarasvati Brahma, who created the universe and language for humans. The natural communication origin for humans is traced by Yule to the natural sound source. This sound source, in a literary sense, is what we describe as the Onomatopoeic Theory of language since sounds are associated with the things concerned. This natural sound is the Bow-Wow Theory of communication.

Again, the social interaction theory/origin that Yule expounds is the Yohe-ho Theory. This theory is in agreement with Chomsky’s communication competence because it places the development of human language in a social context. Other origins of language include the physical adaptation source, the tool-making source, and the genetic source.

Undoubtedly, language is not only for communication but also for the satisfaction of needs. These needs are physical, identity, social and practical. The physical need encourages health, identity need stops loss of identity and encourages a sense of humanity; social need calls for desire and practical need calls for attention. Through learning, individuals will be able to produce well-formed utterances or sentences because the perceptual device has a stock of analytic procedures available to it; one corresponding to each kind of phrase is what Yule (1996) calls strategic competence. The language learning process has socio-linguistic implications. The level of writing or speaking with a certain level of intelligibility, Chomsky says, is natural since there is a language acquisition device in each human. Chomsky continues that the device has a certain analytical data-processing mechanism or inductive principles of a very elementary sort.

Saussure (1959) foregrounds what he calls the place of language in the facts of speech. To him, the mental fact is in the brain of the encoder. This mental fact is thought which be represented in the sound image that is used in the expression that travels to the ear of the hearer. Saussure says, this process is purely psychological and physiological, and when it gets to the hearer's brain, the acquisition device becomes activated. The information passing process through sound waves called speech, Saussure says is heterogeneous, for Chomsky, language is homogenous. This means that language is homogeneous and heterogeneous. In this modern era, Prasad (2012) clarifies that language is a device of expression of thought or ideas in written or graphic form.

### **Habits of Thought**

What we speak reflects our habit of thought to the listener. Chomsky (1965) noted that habit of thought or the use of language or hypothesised dispositions to respond, habits, and so on, may provide evidence as to the nature of this mental reality. For Chomsky, whom we depend, "a fully adequate grammar must assign to each of an infinite range of sentences a structural description indicating how this sentence is understood by the ideal speaker-hearer.

### **Language and Literature**

Many may wonder why language and literary studies are together. There appears to be a greater enigma for students of this discipline on the side of literature than language. This apprehension will continue until reading habit returns as a culture or government returns to when rule which promoted the reading of novels and prohibited the reading of any textbooks after classes on three days of the week called the Textbook Act is enforced (Achebe 1991). Even if there is no "Textbook Act" school scholars will fall short of literary grammar. When language **woven** with literature is **introduced** to students, the emerging society will be better **equipped for** communication and understanding. Cassirer (1925) noted that language has a great relationship with art and myth, comprising *Undivided Unity*.

Akwanya (2005) explains that language can do a vast range of things with knowledge or perception: it could report it; it could document it, it could analyse, classify, organise, or process it in some way; it could build structures out of it, relate to others pieces of knowledge and evaluate it; it could guide it to active a contrast or calculation. Language used for many things in Michael Foucault (1970) sense called "analogical" language. Akwanya (2005) says, Analogical language contains sentences that have a fixed word order and thought. In dealing with an analogical sentence at

the level of language, the idea of dissimilitude and exactness crops in. Analogical sentences describe objects with exactness, and this is what literature does, describing with the mind's eye, act, object conjure, and using language. Akwanya (2005) clearly states that Analogical language is based on images, as they can always make use of metaphors, similes, onomatopoeia, and so on, which brings us again to the world of poetry, where language is open, unconstrained, and maximally suggestive .

### **Language, Literature and Thoughts**

Akwanya (2005) noted that language has many functions. Language and literature can be used to express thought. Hudson (1996) states that thought is a proposition, which is the sense in which a concept is made. Thought is what happens in the mind, which is what is expressed or communicated to the hearer through language. Language is expressed or conveyed in sentences. Traditional grammar argues that a sentence is an expression with a complete thought. It is the confusion that language is used only for communication that leads many to misunderstand the connection between literature and language. Crystal (1974) lamented that the English language has decayed since the period of literary excellence, as most quotations illustrating grammatical rules are from famous novelists. If this is true to date, it means one must understand the domain of literature to understand the English language's finest constructions. The domain of literature to language is that of creation.

Literature is well accepted as having a major role in language, not only for communication but also beyond. Akwanya (2005) is right in saying, "where the nature of language is misconceived as communication, the result is that all other roles, creation or constitution, ritual action, description, and so on must be either forms of communication or else language exceeding its propriety, language as an aberration. In addition, there are major drawbacks as regards language learning, in that it encourages the learner to strive for the minimal level of proficiency needed to convey and encode information. This means that the role assigned to the new language is translative. The so-called mother tongue interference becomes an inevitable accompaniment in the new language. In the Nigerian context, Jowitt (1991) accounts for the type of language expressed in the English language with certain colouration. This is the mother tongue attachment by Eka (2000). Youth call Standard Language or near Standard Language a *native language*.

Worthy of note is that language through literature paints an exact picture of one's thoughts. This would continue to remain at a static level in the mind until it is communicated through the spoken or written medium. Aristotle includes thought as the third of the six characters of tragedy within the domain of tragedy. For Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1997), Third in the order of thought, that is, the faculty of saying what

is possible and pertinent in given circumstances, speeches, therefore, which the speaker does not choose or avoid by thought, is found where something is proved to be Diction, the expression of the meaning of words. And its essence is in verse and prose. Here, one's habit of thought is expressed in the language in which that idea is expressed. In other words, users of the English Language should think and express their feelings in English, painting mental images of their similitude because, as the English language represents thoughts, literature in all its genres, elements, principles, and appreciations expresses thoughts.

In Nigeria, emphasis is placed on the English language before one gains admission to study in a higher institution. This shows the level of demand for proficiency in the English language from Nigerian graduates. In principle, most Nigerian graduates are knowledgeable of the English language and proficient. When some of these graduates, believing themselves to have been above average in spoken or written English, are called to teach others in various disciplines using the English Language that is imbued with literature, the result is the opposite.

In this practice, since the result does not usually match expectations, Inyang (2006) cried out that in an academic environment, scholars and educationists complained about the poor use of English as a means of communication by the different ethnic groups in Nigeria using English as a second language. Therefore, in considering Akwanya's "two modes of production of thought, when language is used, it should be expressed using some literary expression known as figurative expressions, to create images, rhythm, rhyme, and more to enliven the speech or writing. It is in this situation that Akwanya (2005) stressed that it is language that keeps the record of the changes as though it undergoes them, making necessary shifts and adjustments to capture these changes. These changes can cover the structure of a sentence when it moves from literary to literal.

During the restoration period (18th century), language and literature were intertwined. Kermode and Hollander (1973) opined that language has often been described as the dress of thought, and rhetoric has been treated as a wardrobe of idioms in which ideas might be clothed. Thoughts generate the whole process of communication. However, Crystal's (1974) rhetoric, which is the storehouse of literature (Wardrobe), is made manifest by language well organised or structured (dressed well). Kermode and Hollander, in the communication sphere, people speak and communicate, while others express themselves with colour. Language here is depicted as "naked nature. According to Kermode and Hollander (1973), the proper use of language with literary flavour equips the speaker with true wit, and the use of language as a means of conveying messages results in integrity and self-worth. The use of puns shows brilliance, and this is very possible. It is through figurative expression that the audience is overwhelmed with finery.

We have selected some common figurative expressions for general usage of the English language from Kennedy and Gioia (2007), who say a figure of speech is “An expression or comparison that relies not on its literal meaning, but rather on its connotations and suggestion” in their glossary, without editing, as follows:

**Alliteration:** The repetition of two or more consonant sounds in successive words in a line of verse or prose. Alliteration can be used at the beginning of words (“cool cats-initial alliteration) or internally on stressed syllables (“in kitchen cups concupiscence cords”). While it combines initial and internal alliteration. Alliteration was a central feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry and is still used by contemporary writers.

**Allusion:** A brief (and sometimes indirect) reference in a text to a person, place, or thing - Fictitious or actual. An allusion may appear in a literary work as an initial quotation, a passing mention of a name, or as a place borrowed from another writer, often carrying the meanings and implications of the original. Allusions imply a common set of knowledge between the reader and writer and operate as a literary shorthand to enrich the meaning of a text. [The Nigerian example is Timaya’s song “If to say,” where he made use of many allusion such as

If to say I be wrestler  
I for become a Huck Horgan  
If to say I be boxer  
I for become Mike Tyson  
...If to say I be actor  
... I for become John Nyamah  
... I be musician  
That is why dem call me Timaya

**Antithesis:** Word, phrase, clause, or sentence set in deliberate contrast to one another. Antithesis balances opposing ideas, tones, or structures, usually to heighten the effect of a statement.

**Archetype:** A recurring symbol, character, landscape, or event found in myth and literature across different cultures and eras. The idea of the archetype came into literary criticism from a Swiss Psychologist, Carl Jung, who believed that all individuals share a “collective unconscious,” a set of primal memories common to the human race that exists in our subconscious.

**Assonance:** The repetition of two or more vowel sounds in successive words, which creates a kind of rhyme. Like alliteration, the assonance may occur initially, “all the

awful auguries” or internally “white lilacs”. Assonance focuses attention on key words or concepts. Assonance also helps make a phrase or line more memorable.

**Epigraph:** A brief quotation preceding a story or a literary work. An Epigraph usually suggests the subject, themes, or atmosphere the story will explore.

**Irony:** A literary device in which a discrepancy of meaning is marked beneath the surface of the language. Irony is present when a writer says one thing but means something quite opposite. There are many kinds of irony, but the two major varieties are verbal irony (in which the discrepancy is contained in words) and situational irony (in which the discrepancy exists when something is about to happen to a character or characters who expect the opposite outcome). Others are cosmic irony, irony of fate, verbal irony, and sarcasm. (Irony of fate is a type of situated irony).

**Metaphor:** A statement that one thing is something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not. By asserting that a thing is something else, a metaphor creates a close association between the entities and usually underscores some important similarity between them.

**Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which the name of a thing is substituted for that of another closely associated with it. [Example, Aso Rock is in control of the country].

**Onomatopoeia:** A literary device that attempts to represent a thing or action by the word that imitates the sound associated with it (e.g., the slip-slap sound of slippers).

**Personification:** A figure of speech in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term is endowed with human characteristics. Personification allows an author to dramatise the non-human world in tangible human terms.

**Pun:** A play on words in which one word is substituted for another with a similar or identical sound, but for a very different meaning.

**Simile:** A comparison of two things, indicated by some connective, usually like, as, than, or a verb such as resembles. A simile usually compares two things that initially seem unlike but are shown to have a significant resemblance. For instance, cool as a cucumber, my love is like a red rose.

## **CONCLUSION**

Abusers of Language rules, and the lack of figurative expressions during communications, may not know Kermode and Hollander (1973), how barbarous and gothic the verbal (sometimes written) sophistries are and the extent to which expressions of this nature delude the minds of our younger generations who look up to us as models.

Plato gives a soft landing where the learning of principles must be re-emphasised. So that we can pass from darkness to light, Plato (1997) says, I believe, to infuse into the mind a knowledge of which it was destitute, just as sight might be instilled into blinded eyes. There is a faculty residing in the soul of each person, and an instrument enabling each of us to learn. Plato's "faculty" resides in the soul, which matches Chomsky's Language acquisition device. What it means is that everyone has the innate ability to learn. In this case, the English language mixes and mingles with literature in the production of thoughts, and it is the most effective, if not the only, medium through which knowledge is transmitted in higher institutions. Where English Language and literature are contentiously used, one must note that language and literature stand aloof to the extent of their abuses by these quarters, not worst in the classrooms but in public communication. This has to stop. If you go to drink from somebody's house, do not think that from the veranda, you can have knowledge of the quantity of water in the water-pot. Do not drink the Veranda water given to you. Calm down and drink. Drink slowly and have that momentary quench of thirst, for unless you live there, till you die, you will continue to be thirsty for such water.

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