

African Cultural Identity and Conversational Implicature: A Critical Analysis of Chief Gaa by Sola Owonibi

Olajide Felix Ogidan^{1*}, Gbenga Nelson Adeyemo² & Funmilayo Mabel Oguntade³.

^{1, 2} Department of Languages, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State.

³ The Federal University of Technology, Akure

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.17113463

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received : 08-09-2025

Accepted : 11-09-2025

Available online : 13-09-2025

Copyright©2025 The Author(s):

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

Citation: Ogidan, O. F., Adeyemo, G. N., & Oguntade, F. M. (2025). African Cultural Identity and Conversational Implicature: A Critical Analysis of Chief Gaa by Sola Owonibi. *IKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (IKRJAHS)*, 1(4), 200-205.



ABSTRACT

Original research paper

This study is concerned with conversational implicatures in the work of Sola Owonibi. We study this work Chief Gaa with the aim of showing that what speakers say may mean different things from what they intend to say or what the hearers may imply. It is noted from the analysis that the readers and listeners have to work out what is implied in the conversations between the characters in the text. The work gives a profound insight into a typical African cultural democratic system of governance before the intrusion of the white men. A diligent analysis of the utterances of major characters in the text reveals certain expressions by implicature can only be attributed to the use of language in conversational context. The work also within the Grice's theory reveals the extensive use of conversational implicature. H.Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle helps in understanding the speakers and the listeners cooperative use of inference in arriving at what is implied by the author. This implicature helps in understanding our cultural identity in the use of rich Yoruba language in transmitting our cultural value.

Keywords: Implicature, Conversation, Cooperative, Utterances, Culture.

**Corresponding author: Olajide Felix Ogidan*

Department of Languages, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State.

Introduction

The author of Chief Gaa, Professor Sola Owonibi is an award winning African Poet and Playwright. He is a Professor of English at the Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko. He is a research Scholar at the Center for African Studies of the University of Florida. His area of researches and publications include Literature and Medicine, Gender Studies and African Oral Literature. Professor Sola Owonibi is a member of many professional bodies which include but not limited to: Association of Nigerian Author (ANA), African Literature Association (ALA), African Studies Association (ASA), International Society for Oral Literature of Africa (ISOLA), and African Writers in Translation (AWT). He is a

research Scholar at the Center for African Studies of the University of Florida.

The Book

The book; Chief Gaa chronicles the history of the Yoruba traditional cabinet of the Oyo Empire. It tells the activities of Oyo cabinet known as the Oyomesi under the autocratic leadership of Basorun Gaa. After the executions of four traditional rulers by Chief Gaa, the Oyomesi installs Abiodun Adegoolu as the new Alafin of Oyo. Chief Gaa removes any king at will, thus the new king; Abiodun Adegoolu fears Chief Gaa. The king decides to go and pay homage to Chief Gaa every morning in his house. This act is to massage the

ego of Chief Gaa who is more powerful than the Alafin of Oyo. In addition, to this, he plans to give his only child; Agboyin in marriage to Chief Gaa, all to an attempt to appease Chief Gaa. The king, Abiodun Adegoolu pays homage to Chief Gaa as promised. He likewise promises his loyalty to Chief Gaa. Not too long, there is crisis between Gaa and Adegoolu. The only child of Adegoolu; Agboyin who stays with Iya-Mode and hawks kolanut around the town. She is secretly in love with Akinkunmi against her father's wish that she should marry Chief Gaa. Gbagi (Chief Gaa's chief messenger) eavesdrops the conversation among Adegoolu and Iya-Made, Kudeefu, Oyomesi, Alapinni that Agboyin should succeed Adegoolu. This desire to make Agboyin, a girl king in Oyo, annoys Basorun Gaa. Two relations of Basorun Gaa (Olayiotan and Obe) kill a porter with cutlass, yet Basorun Gaa shields them from being punished. Yet, he wants to punish those (Samu and Akinkunmi) who bring the murderers. When the king hears it, the crisis between them (Adegoolu and Basorun Gaa) gets hotter. In his attempts to get more powerful charms, Basorun Gaa consults his Babalawo to make more sophisticated charms for him. The Babalawo demands for Agbonrin, an animal as part of the ingredients for the new charm. But Basorun Gaa tells the Babalawo to use Agboyin, the only child of Kabiyesi. Babalawo kills the daughter of Adegoolu and uses her blood for the charm. The whole town rises against Basorun Gaa. He is eventually defeated.

African; Yoruba Cultural Identity

Since each society is different and unique, Africans are in various forms, the uniqueness cannot be too far from the cultural identities which make them a people with different background. Unimna, F.A., et al (2024), avers that "Culture is the whole of what man has learned as a part of a society, including information, beliefs, traditions, arts, morality, laws, and any other skills and habits." In the same vein, Ngare, L.L. (2023) opines that culture refers to habits, knowledge, beliefs and customs shared among people living in a society. It is an identity marker. It is the paraphernalia holding a people's essence of existence".

Needed to be stated here is the fact that the African ways of life, in term of political setting, system of administration, economic and social cultural values were influenced by the Europeans through the machinery of selfish African leaders during the colonial epoch.

Culture has to do with the particular characteristics and total knowledge about a group of people which cover their languages, social life and system of administration. According to Eboigbe, D.I. & Ajisebiyawo, A.S. (2024) our culture influences our way of life, and views about life and behavioural background at all levels including politics. According to Chukwurah, G. O., et al (2025) Cultural heritage is an integral part of people's well-being. It must be noted that the Yoruba people live in the South Western part

of Nigeria where they are known for their rich all-encompassing and unblemished cultural heritage.

Methodology

In this work, the book "Chief Gaa" has 137 pages with four acts. Act one has three scenes, act two with five scenes, act three with four scenes, and act four with four scenes. We have selected thirty (30) utterances as our data from the book. These extracted data are labelled utterances 1-30. We need to note here that we have limited the data to 30 extracts in order to be thorough in our analysis.

Theoretical framework

The linguistic framework adopts for this analysis is H. Paul Grice's theory. This is known as the Gricean Cooperative Principle. This theoretical framework is instrumental in the analysis of the speaker's and hearer's cooperative use of inference in arriving at what is implied by the speakers. Through this theory, we note that it is the speaker's awareness that the listener will add up his utterances with inferences that give the speaker the liberty to imply something rather than stating it, as we will see in our analysis of Chief Gaa by Sola Owonibi.

The Gricean Theory is noted for participants in talk exchanges to observe in conversation. The purpose and the direction of the conversation may be fixed from the start or it may evolve during the exchanges. The Gricean theory postulates that there must be a general principle which participants will be expected to observe. This is known as Cooperative Principle. The conversation is expected to make meaningful contributions such as it is required and for what purpose during the conversation. This cooperative principle aims at making communication works effectively between speakers and listeners through the cooperative use of implication and inference.

Gricean Theory postulates four maxims, which are (pp. 26-27)

a. The Maxim of Quantity, this says that make your contribution as informative as required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

b. The Maxim of Quality, this says that your contribution must be true. Do not say what you lack adequate evidence.

c. The Maxim of Relation, this guides our conversation in a relevant posture. What we say must be relevant to the conversation at the material time.

d. The Maxim of Manner, this guides our exchanges to be brief, orderly, to avoid ambiguity in our expressions.

Grice further asserts that the speakers and the listeners should care about the goals of the conversation such as giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced. The speakers and the listeners must have interest in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the cooperative Principle and the Maxims. (30)

Conversational Implicature

Pragmatics is interested in conversational implicature according to Jacob Mey (2006). Because we seem to be dealing here with a regularity that cannot be captured in a simple syntactic or semantic “rule”, but has to be accounted for in other ways (45). According to Jacob Mey, A conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language use. (45). Also, Jack Bilmes (1986) opines that when we talk, we often convey propositions that we are not explicit in our utterances but are merely implied by them. We draw inferences only by referring to what has been explicitly said to some conversational principle. (27) Jacob Mey further averses that conversational implicature concerns the way we understand an utterance in conversation in accordance with what we expect to hear. (46) It is clearer and subsists to say that meanings to utterances depend largely on the explicit and the unsaid sense in the conversation. He further explains that if we limit pragmatic explanation to the strictly grammatical, we would have to exclude such relevant answers. To interpret what people mean, you have to interpret what they say. (47)

From the forgoing, the conversations between major characters in our text will be our reference points in bringing out implicature as implied in their conversation.

Textual Analysis

Text 1 (p.3)

GAA: “He was courageous.”

SAMU: “So Courageous, your highness. He neither shouted nor struggled.”

Implicature: “Samu obeys the maxim of manner and is brief and orderly in speaking to Gaa and other chiefs. He is praising Adegoolu to do more.”

Text 2 (p.5)

CHIEFS: “Your Majesty! Your Majesty!”

GAA: “Enough! Enough of this Majesty’s business. I am not king and you all know it.”

Implicature: Basorun Gaa obeys the maxim of manner by being counterpart with the Chiefs. But Gaa likes the praises from the chiefs as a powerful Basorun.

Text 3 (p.6)

ALL: “More health to you! More health to you!! More health to you!!!”

GAA: “I thank you! I thank you all!!!”

Implicature: Chief Gaa obeys the maxim of quantity by giving information to all the chiefs. But he is happy with the required praises from them.

Text 4 (p.7)

ALL: “You have spoken our mind. K’ara o le o!”

GAA: “If that is your mind, you have spoken well.”

Implicature: Gaa is brief in obeying the maxim of manner. He invariably speaks their mind because they do not have option.

Text 5 (p.8)

ALL: “We say your words are pleasing to us.”

GAA: “Let us make Adegoolu king.”

Implicature: All the chiefs and Chief Gaa are obeying the maxim of quality. They make their contributions informative. They only follow the authoritarian tendency of Chief Gaa.

Text 6 (p.11)

AKIN: “True, they have made him King. But does any Prince who fails to grease the palms of the chiefs ever ascend the throne?”

OLUBU: “Gaa keeps them in check. But I wonder if Gaa, the king-maker, is not also Gaa, the king-killer.”

Implicature: Both Akinkunmi and Olubu obey the maxim of quality by saying what is true. They know the damage that Gaa can do to any King.

Text 7 (p.14)

ADEGOOLU: “Help me! Ah! Help me!”

ALAPINNI: “We will not help you.”

ADEGOOLU: “What is my offence? Help!”

Implicature: The chiefs obey the maxim of manner in the approach to grab Adegoolu for the traditional task ahead. The Chiefs are determined to install Adegoolu as the new king of Oyo.

Text 8 (p.15)

ALL: “Kabiyesi o. Kabiyesi oo. Kabiyesi oo.”

ADEGOOLU: “(rises) And what of our father, Maajeogbe?”

SAMU: “Maajeogbe has perished. Now we speak of Adegorioye Adegoolu is our King.”

Implicature: The Chiefs obey the maxim of quantity by not saying too much. They make their Information as informative as required. What they have not stated is implied in their actions towards Adegoolu.

Text 9 (p.18)

GAA: “People of Oyo we are here to do the final rites for Adegoolu. Whoever has any objections let him step forward here and speak”

ALL: “We are pleased! We are pleased!”

Implicature: Basorun Gaa abides by the maxim of relation by being relevant in circumstance of the rite for Adegoolu. Nobody dares says anything from what Chief Gaa says.

Text 10 (p.20)

OLOGBO: “Your Majesty!”

GAA: “Enough of your lengthy talk. Enumerate the past kings so that we can disperse.”

Implicature: Gaa adheres to the maxim of manner by asking Ologbo and other chiefs to be brief in their talk. They know the unstated intention of Chief Gaa.

Text 11 (p.28)

ADEGOOLU: “Iya-Ile-Ori, the thought is pleasing to me. Let us give it a trial. I shall know no shame.”

IYA-ILE-ORI: “(Bewildered) You shall do it? You can?”

KUDEEFU: “It will be good if you can do it, our father.”

Implicature: All the characters follow the maxim of manner by avoiding ambiguity in their utterances. The motive is not fully stated in their utterances.

Text 12 (p.37)

AKINKUNMI: “I keep my silence at the palace, “Ease myself!” Oh, what if I want to defecate?

How do I say that?”

AGBOYIN: “I want to touch my hands to the ground.”

Implicature: Both participants act upon the maxim of manner by being brief in their conversation. The feeling of love between them is not fully stated but can be implied.

Text 13 (p.40)

AKINKUNMI: “Agboyin! Agboyin!” (Akinkunmi is startled on sighting Iya Mode.)

“Ha! My Mother! I did not know you were here.”

IYA MODE: “Who is your mother, Akinkunmi?”

Implicature: It is obvious that they embrace the maxim of quality by saying what is true. But our tradition allows Akinkunmi to call her “my mother”.

Text 14 (p.41)

AKINKUNMI: “Thank you. Farewell, Agboyin, good morning.”

AGBOYIN: “Thank you, good morning to you.”

Implicature: It is known to both characters what is not obviously stated in the conversation. The feeling of love is not stated but it can be implied in their utterances.

Text 15 (p.47)

GAA: “Ha! Adegoolu! Rise up! Do not turn the world on its head. Let me be the one to first greet you”

ADEGOOLU: “Iba, you are my father. I shall not dishonour my sky because I am King.”

Implicature: Both Adegoolu and Chief Gaa observe the maxim of manner in their conversation, but much are kept in their minds. We can as well imply from their behaviour.

Text 16 (p.48)

GBAGI: “May you be in sound health! May you be in sound health!”

GAA: “Good. Gbagi, go into the house. Bring money. Bring plenty kola for Abiodun.”

Implicature: There is an implied meaning in the gift being offered to Adegoolu by Gaa. Chief Gaa expects more of such homage from Adegoolu.

Text 17(p.49)

ADEGOOLU: “May you be in sound health...”

GAA: “Well, done. I shall not be a mere supporter to you. I shall make arrangements. I will stand solidly beside you.”

Implicature: Both Adegoolu and Gaa adhere to the maxim of manner. They are brief in their conversation without saying much.

Text 18(p.51)

ABIODUN: “I came to speak to our father at first lights.”

GAA: “We need not make the fire of the length of the snake to be roasted.”

Implicature: Both Gaa and Adegoolu embrace the maxim of quantity with implied meanings. Kabiyesi has a lot in his mind which are not stated in their utterances.

Text 19 (p.64)

AKINKUNMI: “Oyo. Even the King is not excluded.”

OLUBUSE: “We are caught in Gaa’s trap. May the Creator grant us liberty.”

Implicature: They fulfil the maxim of quality by stating the obvious truth as regards the activities of Basorun Gaa in Oyo.

Text 20 (p.68)

GBAGI: “May you be in sound health. The child is very wise. One wonders who counsels him.”

GAA: “He courts doom with this desire to put his daughter on the throne. Or, or is it not Agboyin he wishes to put on the throne?”

Implicature: Chief Gaa consents to the maxim of quantity. He says his mind and what he sees in the activity of Abiodun Adegoolu to make his daughter King. His actions imply what he has in mind towards Adegoolu.

Text 21 (p.68)

GAA: “A female king?”

GBAGI: “They would have Agboyin become king.”

GAA: “Will this female King have a Basorun also?”

Implicature: Chief Gaa is only asking a rhetorical question. The implied meaning is that it is not possible in Oyo Kingdom. He is determined to resist such move with anything possible.

Text 22 (p.69)

GBAGI: “Look here, keep quiet. Baba is asking; What did he do?”

SAMU: “Gbagi, who are you telling to keep quiet?”

Implicature: Both Gbagi and Samu are observing the maxim of quality by the truth to themselves and expressing their minds.

Text 23 (p.71)

GAA: “Only one life? Let him ruin an entire land! Does that give you the right to treat a chief’s son thus?”

SAMU: “(pointing at Gbagi) This chap will tarnish your reputation, Your Majesty.”

Implicature: Both the speaker and the listener obey the maxim of relation by being relevant in their utterances. But the implied meaning is that Gaa will deal with Samu.

Text 24 (p.86)

GAA: “Is everything ready as required by Babalawo?”

GBAGI: “All, Kabiyesi!”

Implicature: The characters here go along with the maxim of manner. They are brief with their utterances with implied actions.

Text 25(p.92)

AGBOYIN: “Baba, may you remain strong. It is you I’m meeting on seat today!”

GAA: “Princess! Good morning!”

Implicature: Both Chief Gaa and Agboyin did not say much in their utterances. They only greet and obey the maxim of quantity, but a lot of negative unstated intentions going on in the heart of Chief Gaa.

Text 26 (p.93)

GAA: “You demanded for Agborin, didn’t you?”

BABALAWO: “Kabiyesi.”

GAA: “Carry her. Make use of her.”

Implicature: Chief Gaa did not say much, but we can imply the meanings of what is not said. Babalawo too says less. They both abide by the maxim of quantity to carry out their nefarious action.

Text 27 (p.96)

OBE: “Baba! The house is burning and you are here. Help set down this load.”

GAA: “Do not take anything out. Go pour it back there.”

Implicature: The characters here perform maxim of quantity by making only informative utterances. We understand the unstated actions with Obe.

Text 28 (p.107)

OYA’ ABI: “My lord, Why did you not send a messenger to me? Or has Gaa killed the whole of Oyo.”

ADEGOOLU: “Gaa has not killed the whole of Oyo: It is my eyes Gaa poked with a stick.”

Implicature: We understand the unspoken utterances from these two characters. They only obey the maxim of quantity in their conversation.

Text 29 (p.131)

OYA’ABI: “(Turn to Gaa) Now Gaa! The time has come for you to come to bow before Alafin! So prostrate yourself!”

GAA: “(facing Adegoolu) Kabiyesi, I swear my total allegiance! I have no one to worship beside Alafin.”

Implicature: All the characters have a lot to say but only say few words. They only concur with the maxim of quantity. Gaa is not happy but he has no option at this time.

Text 30 (p.136)

OYA’ABI: “Thank you! Kabiyesi!”

ALL: “Kabiyesi! Kabiyesi!”

Implicature: All the characters have a lot to say but they only obey the maxim of quantity by saying a little and less. They are all happy to have their King back with freedom from Gaa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated an investigation into the inferences that speakers and hearers draw from conversations and utterances. This is done through the analysis of utterances of major characters in our data. We have likewise seen clearly that conversational implicature as seen in our texts relates closely to the theme of cultural identity as illustrated in the major characters in *Chief Gaa*. The study also x-rays the work of Sola Owonibi within the ambit of the Gricean Cooperative Principle.

Throughout the whole selected data, we noted the preponderant use of Cooperative Principle by the characters to lend supports to African cultural identity. It was noticed that a number of cultural identities in the utterances and actions of the characters. This again supports the roles of conversational implicature to enhance Africa culture. We again noticed through the analysis that Yoruba traditional system as exemplified by the characters is rich in ways of administration through check and balance. As demonstrated from the analysis, autocratic tendency has no place in Yoruba cultural system. The Yoruba have ways of removing an autocratic leader or a despot. Again, it must be noted here that the role of conversational implicature in projecting the cultural identities of Africans cannot be overemphasized in the old Oyo Empire till today.

Evidently, this study shows that conversational implicature is an important tool that has been used to illuminate African cultural identity. It has also been used as a network to sustain the norms, culture and values in our society.

From the foregoing, it is recommended that readers of literary texts should take into cognisance the concept of conversational implicature to fully understand implied meanings in the utterances of characters. Also, readers will be well equipped in understanding the implied and unstated meanings from the utterances of the characters. We would like to add here that conversational implicature can be a powerful tool to analyse implied meaning from the utterances of speakers in conversation. Nevertheless, there is considerable room for scholars to expand on the concepts of conversational implicature in projecting African cultural identities.

References

1. Chukwurah, G. O., et al. (2025). Cultural Influence of Local Food Heritage on Sustainable Development. *World*, 6(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world6010010>
2. Eboigbe, D. I. & Ajisebiyawo, A.S. (2024). Identity Politics and the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: A Critique. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*. 7(1): 11-16 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021>.
3. Grice, P. (1991). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

4. Jacob, M. (2006) *Pragmatics. An Introduction*. United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing.
5. Ngare, L. L. (2023).“Globalization, Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion: A Nigerian Philosophical Perspective”. *AKU: An African Journal of Contemporary Research*. A Publication of the Association for the Promotion of African Studies.ISSN: 26814-0761
6. Owonibi, S. (2021). *Chief Gaa*. Ibadan: Rasmed Publications Limited.
7. Unimna, F.A., et al (2024). Tripartite Relationship among Culture, Identity and Education in Multicultural Nigerian Society. *World Tourism Journal*. Volume 2, Number 1. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379565050>