

Pragmatic Implicature and the Articulation of Protest in Femi Osofisan's Plays

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the need to explore the pragmatic strategies employed by Femi Osofisan in his plays *Women of Owu*, *Morountodun*, and *Red Is the Freedom Road* to depict protest and resistance. The purpose was to analyze the use of pragmatic implicature in these plays, illustrating how implied meanings and contextual cues enhance the expression of socio-political struggles. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study conducted a content analysis of key speeches within the selected texts, examining the pragmatic implicature of the language used. Three major findings emerged: first, Osofisan's use of implicature effectively exposed the moral hypocrisy and brutality of oppressors; second, the speeches affirmed the importance of unity and collective action in resistance movements; third, the implicit messages within the dialogues fostered a deeper emotional and ethical engagement with the audience, enhancing the plays' impact. The study concluded that pragmatic implicature is a crucial linguistic tool in Osofisan's work, which enriches the narrative and powerfully conveys the dynamics of protest and resilience. This study contributed to a better understanding of how language can be used to articulate and inspire resistance within socio-political contexts.

Keywords: *Femi Osofisan, pragmatic implicature, protest, resistance, African literature.*

Introduction

Femi Osofisan stands as one of the most influential contemporary Nigerian playwrights, renowned for his incisive exploration of socio-political themes and his deft use of language to articulate the dynamics of human experience. His plays often explore the realities of power dynamics, oppression, and resistance, reflecting the turbulent history and ongoing struggles within Nigerian society and beyond. Among his extensive body of work, *Women of Owu*, *Morountodun*, and *Red Is the Freedom Road* are particularly notable for their vivid portrayals

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of protest and activism. These plays not only provide compelling narratives but also serve as rich texts for examining how language, particularly pragmatic implicature, can be used as a powerful tool to convey deeper meanings and foster a subtle understanding of resistance (Jegade and Adesina 64-75).

This study centers on the need to understand how pragmatic implicature functions as a linguistic device in the articulation of protest and resistance within Osofisan's plays. While there has been substantial scholarly attention on the thematic and historical aspects of his work (Jegade and Lawal 118-39; Omolara Adebileje and Atunde 135-40; Adedeji 279-92; Adeoti 123-44; Damelegue 96-111; Epochi-Olise 27-108; Götrick 82-98; Nnanna 57-69; Oni 135-40; Oyeleye 270-82; Sesan 183-202), less focus has been placed on the specific pragmatic strategies he employs to enhance the depth and impact of his narratives. Pragmatic implicature, which involves the implied meanings that arise in context beyond the literal expressions, plays a crucial role in enriching the dialogue and monologues within these plays. Understanding this aspect of Osofisan's craft is essential for a fuller appreciation of how his characters' speeches connect with audiences and convey challenging socio-political messages. Focusing on these plays enables the study to highlight the ways in which Osofisan's characters use language to challenge oppression, evoke empathy, and inspire action. This analysis will contribute to the broader field of literary and linguistic studies by offering insights into the relationship between language and socio-political context in African literature. Moreover, it seeks to affirm the importance of linguistic analysis in understanding and interpreting the rich layers of meaning in dramatic texts, thereby fostering a deeper engagement with Osofisan's work and its relevance to contemporary discourses on justice and human rights.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Grice's Theory of Implicature

Pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics, explores how context influences the interpretation of meaning in communication (Jegade 105-20). A central concept within pragmatics is implicature, which refers to the implied meanings that arise from conversational exchanges beyond the literal content of spoken or written words. One of the most influential frameworks in understanding implicature is the theory proposed by Herbert Paul Grice in his 1975 seminal work on conversational implicature. Grice introduced the concept of implicature as a way to account for the meanings that speakers convey indirectly, through their adherence to or

deviation from conversational norms. According to Grice, implicature is a crucial component of communication because it allows interlocutors to convey more than what is explicitly stated, enriching the interpretative experience of the audience.

Grice's theory is grounded in his famous Cooperative Principle, which posits that speakers generally adhere to four conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. The Maxim of Quantity suggests that speakers provide the right amount of information—not too much, not too little. The Maxim of Quality advises speakers to be truthful and not provide information that is false or misleading. The Maxim of Relation requires that contributions be relevant to the ongoing conversation, and the Maxim of Manner stresses clarity and avoid ambiguity. Grice's work elucidates how speakers might flout these maxims deliberately to produce implicatures. For example, if a speaker says, "She's usually very punctual," they may imply that the person in question is late on this occasion, despite not stating it directly. This aspect of implicature is particularly relevant in literary texts, where characters often use language in subtle ways to imply meanings that drive the plot or reveal deeper aspects of their personalities.

In literary texts, especially in dramatic works like those of Femi Osofisan, implicature is essential for conveying challenging socio-political themes and character dynamics. Characters often use indirect language, metaphor, and irony to express resistance or critique, relying on the audience's understanding of conversational implicature to decode these messages (Jegede 105-20). For example, a character's seemingly innocuous statement might carry significant implied criticism of a political regime or societal norms, which becomes apparent through the audience's grasp of the context and the underlying conversational maxims. Analyzing these elements helps uncover the deeper layers of meaning in literary dialogue and understand how playwrights like Osofisan use linguistic strategies to engage with themes of protest and activism.

Cultural and Historical Contexts in Osofisan's Works

Femi Osofisan's plays are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical contexts of Nigeria, reflecting the socio-political struggles and transformations of the country. To understand how Osofisan uses implicature to critique and reflect upon these contexts, it is essential to examine the historical events and cultural dynamics that shape his work. Nigeria's post-colonial history, marked by political instability, corruption, and social upheaval, provides a backdrop against

which Osofisan's plays explore themes of resistance and activism (Akoh 155-74). His works often draw upon traditional Yoruba cultural elements while engaging with contemporary issues, creating a dialogue between historical heritage and modern socio-political realities.

The historical context of Nigeria's political context is crucial in understanding the thematic concerns of Osofisan's plays. The country has experienced various phases of political turbulence, including military coups, authoritarian rule, and widespread corruption. These historical events are reflected in the socio-political themes of Osofisan's plays, where characters frequently confront the injustices of oppressive regimes and struggle for social change (Awodiya, "Form and Technique" 102-19; Awodiya, *The Drama* 2010). For instance, Morountodun portrays the Agbekoya farmers' revolt against exploitative government policies, drawing on historical instances of peasant uprisings (Dasyuva). By embedding these historical struggles into his narratives, Osofisan employs implicature to critique the failures of political systems and highlight the resilience of marginalized communities. The use of indirect language and symbolism allows him to address the sensitive nature of political dissent and resistance (Evwierhoma).

Culturally, Osofisan's works are deeply informed by Yoruba traditions and folklore, which provide a rich linguistic and thematic framework for his exploration of socio-political issues (Omolaro Adebileje and Atunde 135-40). Traditional Yoruba storytelling techniques, proverbs, and myths are woven into the fabric of his plays, offering a means of indirect critique and commentary. In *Women of Owu*, for example, Osofisan reinterprets the classical Greek tragedy *The Trojan Women* within a Yoruba context, using the play's structure to comment on the historical and cultural significance of the Owu Wars (Adedeji 279-92). The use of implicature in this play allows Osofisan to subtly critique the destructive impact of war on communities while engaging with Yoruba cultural values and historical narratives (Adeoti 123-44). This approach not only honors traditional forms but also transforms them to address contemporary issues of war and loss (Damelegue 96-111).

Additionally, Osofisan's engagement with cultural and historical contexts extends to his reflections on social change and activism. His plays often incorporate elements of Nigerian popular culture, including music, dance, and oral traditions, to connect with audiences and affirm the relevance of his critiques (Epochi-Olise 27-108). Integrating these cultural elements with contemporary socio-political themes, Osofisan forges a dynamic connection between past

and present. His use of implicature in this context serves to challenge audiences to reflect on the continuity of social issues and the evolving nature of resistance (Götrick 82-98). For instance, in *Red Is the Freedom Road*, Osofisan uses vibrant cultural expressions to frame his critique of socio-political injustices, illustrating how cultural and historical contexts inform and amplify his messages of resistance and hope (Nnanna 57-69; Sesan 183-202).

Review of Past Works on Femi Osofisan's Plays

Funke Oni's study, "Lexical Choices and (Re)presentation of Victimhood in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*," critically examines how language is used to depict victimhood in the play. Oni explores Osofisan's strategic use of lexical choices to emphasize the suffering and resilience of the women in post-war Owu. The study reveals how linguistic patterns in the text not only reflect the emotional and psychological trauma of war but also challenge prevailing narratives about victimization and agency. Through a close textual analysis, Oni reveals the intersection of language, power, and gender, providing insights into the broader socio-political implications of Osofisan's work. This research is valuable for its subtle exploration of language as a tool for social commentary, making it an essential read for scholars of African literature, gender studies, and discourse analysis.

Adebola Adebileje and Oluwatoyosi Atunde's study, "A Discourse Analysis of Language Use in Femi Osofisan's *The Midnight Blackout*," explores how language constructs meaning and reflects socio-political realities in Osofisan's play. Through a detailed discourse analysis, the authors examine the language choices that highlight themes of power, resistance, and social critique. The study effectively applies linguistic frameworks to analyze dialogues and monologues, revealing how Osofisan's characters engage in challenging socio-political contexts. Examining elements such as pragmatics, implicature, and discourse markers, Adebileje and Atunde provide fresh insights into the interplay between language and power within post-colonial Nigerian society. Their analysis demonstrates how Osofisan's language use both mirrors and challenges societal norms, making it a valuable contribution to studies on African drama and discourse analysis. The research is particularly relevant for scholars of literature, linguistics, and cultural studies.

Oluwatomi Adeoti's study, "Pragmatic Acts in Characters' Utterances in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*," provides a subtle exploration of how meaning is negotiated in dramatic dialogue. Utilizing Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory alongside concepts such as implicature and

presupposition, Adeoti analyzes selected extracts from the play to reveal the pragmatic acts—termed “practs”—performed in the characters' speech. The study demonstrates how context, cultural background, and language function collaboratively to generate specific meanings and actions within the play. Adeoti’s findings highlight the importance of context in understanding the depth of meaning behind characters' utterances and emphasize the role of language as a tool for social and cultural expression. This research is an insightful contribution to the field of pragmatics, particularly in its application to African drama, and is valuable for scholars interested in discourse analysis and literary studies.

Oyeronke Oyeleye’s article, “Psychic Reality of Female Characters in Ahmed Yerima’s *The Sisters* and Femi Osofisan’s *Women of Owu*,” offers a compelling examination of the psychological dimensions of female characters in these two significant African plays. Oyeleye employs a psychoanalytic approach to explore how the inner lives and emotional experiences of the female characters are portrayed and understood. The study reveals how both Yerima and Osofisan use their characters to reflect broader social and cultural issues, including gender roles and societal expectations. Through an exploration of the psychological depth and development of these characters, Oyeleye illuminates the complexities of female identity and agency in contemporary African drama. This insightful analysis not only enhances our understanding of the plays but also contributes to broader discussions on gender and psychology in literature, making it a valuable resource for scholars in literary and cultural studies.

Azeez Sesan’s article, “Representation of Women’s War Experiences in Femi Osofisan’s *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*,” provides a detailed analysis of how women’s experiences of war are depicted in Osofisan’s plays. Sesan explores the thematic and narrative strategies employed by Osofisan to highlight the impact of conflict on female characters, revealing how their struggles and resilience are portrayed. Through an analysis of both *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*, Sesan demonstrates how Osofisan uses these plays to address gender dynamics and the wider socio-political ramifications of conflict. The article offers valuable insights into the ways Osofisan's drama serves as a medium for expressing women's voices and experiences in times of conflict. Sesan’s study contributes significantly to the understanding of gender and conflict in African literature, making it a crucial read for scholars of literature and gender studies.

Lare Damelegue's article, "Ethnicity, Conflicts and Peace Strategies in African Post-colonial Theatre: A Reading of Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*," offers a significant analysis of how ethnicity and conflict are portrayed in Osofisan's play. Damelegue examines the thematic elements of ethnic strife and the quest for peace within the context of post-colonial African theatre. Focusing on *Women of Owu*, the article uncovers how Osofisan explores the complexities of ethnic identities and the impact of conflict on society. Damelegue's analysis emphasises the play's role in advocating for reconciliation and understanding amidst societal fragmentation. This insightful review contributes to the broader discourse on African drama by revealing how Osofisan uses theatrical narrative to engage with and critique post-colonial issues, making it a valuable resource for scholars interested in drama, post-colonial studies, and peace studies.

Niyi Adedeji's article, "History as a Tool for Shaping History: The Example of Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*," offers an insightful analysis of how history is utilized as a narrative device in Osofisan's play. Adedeji explores the ways in which *Women of Owu* uses historical events and figures to reflect on contemporary issues and reshape historical narratives. The article reveals how Osofisan employs historical context not only to enhance the dramatic impact of the play but also to engage with broader questions of memory, identity, and historical interpretation. Adedeji's examination reveals the play's dual function as both a historical commentary and a critique of historical processes, demonstrating how literature can influence and reinterpret historical understanding. This review is valuable for scholars interested in the intersection of history and drama, particularly in the context of African literature and its role in shaping historical discourse.

Etuwe Ruth Epochi-Olise's article, "Resonances of Osofisan's *Women of Owu*: A Postmodernist Approach," provides a thorough postmodernist analysis of Femi Osofisan's play. Epochi-Olise examines how *Women of Owu* employs postmodern techniques to engage with themes of fragmentation, intertextuality, and metafiction. The study explores the ways in which the play disrupts traditional narrative forms and reflects on the fluidity of historical and cultural identities. Applying a postmodernist lens, Epochi-Olise demonstrates how Osofisan's work pushes conventional boundaries and confronts complex notions of reality and representation. The article's analysis emphasises the innovative narrative strategies used by Osofisan to address contemporary issues through a postmodern framework. This review is

essential for scholars interested in postmodernism in African literature and the evolving narrative techniques in contemporary drama.

Ndubuisi Nnanna's article, "The Demonization of Woman in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*," provides a critical examination of how female characters are represented in Osofisan's play. Nnanna explores the themes of gender and power, focusing on how women are demonized and marginalized within the narrative. The article explores the ways in which Osofisan portrays women as both victims and villains, reflecting broader societal attitudes and tensions. Through an analysis of specific instances from the play, Nnanna uncovers the nuances of female representation and its impact on understanding gender dynamics in postcolonial African contexts. This review offers valuable insights into the critical discourse on gender in African literature, highlighting how Osofisan's work engages with and critiques traditional gender roles. Nnanna's analysis is a significant contribution to the study of gender and drama, offering a comprehensive perspective on the portrayal of women in Osofisan's oeuvre.

Muyiwa P. Awodiya's article, "Form and Technique in Femi Osofisan's Plays," offers a detailed analysis of the structural and stylistic elements in Osofisan's works. Awodiya examines how Osofisan's innovative use of form and technique contributes to the thematic depth and dramatic impact of his plays. The article illustrates Osofisan's creative experimentation with narrative structures, language, and performance techniques, illustrating how these elements serve to enhance the social and political commentary within his drama. Through an examination of specific plays, Awodiya offers insights into Osofisan's distinctive approach to dramatic composition and its broader significance within African theatre. This review is valuable for scholars interested in the intersections of form, technique, and content in modern drama, offering a comprehensive understanding of Osofisan's contributions to the field.

This study addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on how pragmatic implicature functions within Osofisan's plays to articulate protest. While previous studies such as Funke Josephine Oni's "Lexical Choices and (Re)presentation of Victimhood in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*" and Oluwatomi O. Adeoti's "Pragmatic Acts in Characters' Utterances in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*" explore the thematic and pragmatic dimensions of Osofisan's work, they do so with differing emphases. Oni's study examines lexical choices and victimhood, revealing how language reflects and challenges narratives of

suffering, while Adeoti's research focuses on pragmatic acts and meaning negotiation. Similarly, Adebola Omolara Adebileje and Oluwatoyosi Atunde's discourse analysis illustrates themes of power and resistance through language, while Sesan's work focuses on women's war experiences. This study intends to fill the gap by specifically analyzing how pragmatic implicature operates to express dissent and protest across multiple plays by Osofisan, providing a unified framework to understand how subtle, context-dependent meanings contribute to the thematic protest in his oeuvre. This approach will offer a new perspective on the intersection of language, power, and resistance in Osofisan's dramatic work.

Methodology

The methodology for this study involves a qualitative research design, focusing on content analysis of selected texts by Femi Osofisan to explore the use of pragmatic implicature in depicting protest and resistance. The choice of texts—*Women of Owu*, *Morountodun*, and *Red Is the Freedom Road*—is justified by their thematic richness and centrality in Osofisan's oeuvre, each offering a unique perspective on socio-political struggles within different historical and cultural contexts. Data collection involves a thorough examination of key speeches within these plays, identifying instances where characters articulate resistance and activism. These speeches are then analyzed for their pragmatic implicature, assessing how implied meanings and contextual cues enhance the expression of protest. This analysis involves a close reading of the texts, supported by linguistic theory on implicature and discourse analysis, to uncover the layers of meaning that contribute to the plays' impact. Through a systematic examination of the speeches' content and the pragmatic functions of their language, the study seeks to illuminate how Osofisan's use of implicature enhances the narrative while effectively conveying the dynamics of resistance. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic strategies employed by Osofisan and their effectiveness in depicting socio-political resistance.

Results

The results of this study examine how Femi Osofisan employs pragmatic implicature as a linguistic tool to articulate protest and resistance in his plays of *Owu*, *Morountodun*, and *Red Is the Freedom Road*. The findings reveal the subtle ways Osofisan critiques socio-political issues through indirect language and contextual implications.

Pragmatic Implicature in Women of Owu

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* is a powerful play that explores the themes of war, loss, and resilience, drawing on the classical Greek play *The Trojan Women* by Euripides, and transposing it to a Yoruba context. The speeches in the play reflect the pain and protest of the women affected by the fall of Owu.

Erelu's speech to the invaders is a poignant example of this protest. She exclaims, "Where were your gods when we cried for mercy? Where were your priests when our children were butchered? You call yourselves warriors, but you are nothing more than butchers!" (5) In this speech, Erelu, the queen mother, challenges the invaders' sense of morality and spirituality. Her speech is a direct protest against the violence and atrocities committed by the invaders. The implicature here is that the invaders are hypocrites, claiming divine sanction while committing inhuman acts. This speech serves as a condemnation of the false righteousness of the conquerors and calls into question the legitimacy of their actions.

Following Erelu's defiant stance, Adumaadan's lament further emphasises the tragedy and devastation brought upon Owu. "Our men are dead, our children enslaved, and we, the Women of Owu, are left with nothing but ashes and memories. Is this the glory of war that you celebrate?" (5)

Adumaadan laments the total destruction of their city and the loss of their loved ones. Her speech is a powerful protest against the glorification of war. The implicature is that the so-called glory of war is hollow and destructive, leaving only suffering and loss in its wake. This challenges the audience to reconsider the true costs of conflict. The sense of betrayal and abandonment by divine forces is poignantly expressed in Orisaye's appeal to the spirits. "Spirits of our ancestors, why have you abandoned us? Did we not honor you with sacrifices and prayers? Why do you let these strangers trample on our sacred land?" (9)

Orisaye's appeal is a form of protest against the perceived abandonment by the divine. The implicature here is a questioning of faith and the efficacy of their religious practices. This speech emphasizes the women's sense of betrayal and abandonment by their own cultural and spiritual foundations, deepening their sense of despair and injustice.

Lawumi's curse introduces a tone of defiance and retribution, "May the gods curse you and your descendants! May you know the same pain and suffering that you have inflicted upon us!"

(10) Lawumi issues a curse against the invaders, using her speech as an act of defiance and a form of protest through the invocation of divine retribution. The implicature is that justice will eventually prevail, and those who commit evil will face consequences. This curse serves as a form of resistance, asserting that the invaders' actions will not go unpunished. Erelu's defiant declaration reflects the unyielding spirit of the Women of Owu, "We will not be broken. We are the Women of Owu, and our spirits are stronger than your swords. You may conquer our land, but you will never conquer our will." (12)

Erelu's declaration is a powerful assertion of resilience and strength. The implicature is that physical conquest does not equate to the conquest of spirit and will. This speech serves as a rallying cry for the Women of Owu, emphasizing their inner strength and determination to endure despite the horrors they have faced.

The speeches in *Women of Owu* are rich with pragmatic implicature, each reflecting different aspects of protest, activism, and resistance. Erelu's challenge to the invaders' morality sets the tone for the play's exploration of justice and hypocrisy. Adumaadan's lament brings the audience face-to-face with the stark realities of war and its devastating consequences, urging a reevaluation of what is often romanticized as glorious combat. Orisaye's appeal to the spirits captures the deep sense of spiritual and cultural betrayal felt by the women, highlighting the disillusionment with the divine.

Lawumi's curse, filled with anger and a desire for justice, is a reminder that actions have consequences and that those who inflict suffering will eventually face retribution. This notion of divine justice is crucial in maintaining hope for the oppressed, providing a sense of future vindication. Erelu's defiant declaration serves as a testament to the indomitable human spirit. Her words are a powerful reminder that while physical structures and lives can be destroyed, the human will, and spirit remain unconquerable.

Through these speeches, Osofisan not only tells the story of the Women of Owu but also raises broader questions about war, justice, and the resilience of the human spirit. The pragmatic implicature embedded in each speech challenges the audience to reflect on the morality of war, the true cost of violence, the role of faith in times of crisis, and the enduring strength of those who suffer. In doing so, *Women of Owu* transcends its historical context, offering timeless insights into the human condition and the perpetual struggle for justice and dignity.

Pragmatic Implicature in *Morountodun*

Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* is a significant work in Nigerian literature that portrays themes of protest and activism through its depiction of the Agbekoya farmers' revolt against the oppressive government. The play illustrates the resistance of the peasantry against exploitation and injustice. Titubi's declaration of solidarity sets the tone for the play's exploration of resistance and moral courage. She proclaims, "I will not stand by and watch while my people are crushed under the weight of oppression. If fighting for justice makes me a criminal, then I am proud to be one!" (9)

This speech is a bold statement of her commitment to the oppressed farmers, rejecting the oppressive labels imposed by the government on those who resist. The pragmatic implicature is that the true crime lies in the government's oppression, not in the farmers' resistance. Titubi's declaration frames the struggle as a just cause, urging others to join in the fight against injustice, and highlighting the moral high ground of their resistance.

Building on Titubi's passionate resolve, Marshal's rallying cry further mobilizes the farmers towards collective action. He implores, "Brothers and sisters, how long will we endure the chains of our oppressors? It is time to rise, to break these chains, and reclaim our land and our dignity!" (10) This speech serves as a powerful call to action, emphasizing the necessity of unity and collective power in overcoming oppression. The pragmatic implicature here is that passive endurance is no longer acceptable, and that liberation requires active struggle. Marshal's words inspire a sense of urgency and solidarity among the farmers, reinforcing the idea that only through united resistance can they reclaim their rights and dignity.

In stark contrast to the rallying cries of Titubi and Marshal, Alhaja's lament poignantly captures the suffering and inequality faced by the oppressed. She mourns, "Our children go hungry while they feast in their palaces. Is this the justice we were promised? Where is the fairness in this world if the rich grow richer on the backs of the poor?" (11) Alhaja's speech emphasizes the disparity between the rich and the poor, critiquing the systemic inequality and corruption that enable the wealthy to thrive at the expense of the poor. The pragmatic implicature is an indictment of the socio-economic structures that perpetuate poverty and exploitation. Her lament calls for a re-examination of what true justice and fairness should entail, shedding light on the deep-rooted issues that fuel the farmers' revolt.

Titubi's confrontation with the authorities further emphasises the resilience and indomitable spirit of the oppressed. She boldly declares, "You may arrest us, beat us, even kill us, but you cannot silence the truth. The voices of the oppressed will echo through the ages, and no amount of force can extinguish the fire of our resistance." (12) This speech is a fearless assertion of the enduring struggle for justice, highlighting that truth and justice cannot be suppressed through violence and intimidation. The pragmatic implicature is that the authorities' attempts to silence dissent will ultimately fail, as the spirit of resistance is transcendent and enduring. Titubi's words embody the resilience and persistence of the activist spirit, reinforcing the idea that the fight for justice is both timeless and invincible.

Lakunle's reflection provides a thoughtful critique of the narratives that justify oppression, offering a vision of empowerment and agency. He reflects, "We have been lied to, deceived into believing that our suffering is our fate. But I say, our destiny is in our hands. We must fight, not just for ourselves, but for our children, and their children, so that they may know a life of dignity and freedom." (15) Lakunle's speech challenges the deterministic view of suffering, asserting that their fate is not predetermined but can be changed through active resistance. The pragmatic implicature is a rejection of fatalism and an assertion of agency, inspiring a long-term vision of freedom and dignity that transcends the immediate struggle. His reflection emphasizes the importance of fighting for future generations, instilling a sense of hope and purpose in the resistance movement.

The speeches in *Morountodun* are imbued with pragmatic implicatures that reflect the themes of protest and activism. Titubi's declaration challenges the legitimacy of the oppressive government, asserting the moral high ground of the resistance. Marshal's rallying cry calls for collective action, emphasizing the power of unity and solidarity in the struggle for liberation. Alhaja's lament critiques systemic inequality and corruption, highlighting the deep-rooted socio-economic issues that fuel the revolt. Titubi's confrontation with the authorities asserts the resilience and persistence of the activist spirit, reinforcing the idea that truth and justice cannot be silenced. Finally, Lakunle's reflection inspires empowerment and agency, challenging fatalistic narratives and emphasizing the importance of fighting for a future of dignity and freedom.

Through these speeches, Osofisan articulates a powerful narrative of resistance and the enduring fight for justice and dignity. The pragmatic implicatures embedded in each speech

challenge the audience to reflect on the morality of oppression, the true cost of passive endurance, the systemic structures that perpetuate inequality, and the resilience and agency of those who resist. In doing so, *Morountodun* transcends its historical context, offering timeless insights into the human condition and the perpetual struggle for justice and empowerment.

Pragmatic Implicature in *Red Is the Freedom Road*

Femi Osofisan's *Red Is the Freedom Road* is a powerful play that captures the essence of protest and activism within a socio-political context. The play's characters express their resistance and aspirations through poignant speeches, which reflect the core themes of the narrative. Femi's call to action ignites the spirit of rebellion and the pursuit of freedom among the oppressed. He declares, "We have lived in chains for too long. It's time to rise and break free from the shackles of oppression. Our freedom is not a gift to be granted; it is a right to be seized." (7) This speech serves as a stirring call to action, urging the oppressed to take control of their destiny. The pragmatic implicature here is a rejection of passivity and the notion that freedom must be granted by oppressors. Instead, it emphasizes agency and the necessity of active struggle to achieve liberation. This speech emphasizes the importance of self-determination and empowerment in the fight for freedom, setting the stage for the characters' collective journey towards emancipation.

Building on Femi's powerful call, Abeni's plea for unity emphasizes the collective strength needed to combat oppression. She passionately states, "Alone, we are vulnerable, but together, we are unstoppable. We must put aside our differences and unite against the common enemy. Our strength lies in our solidarity." (15) Abeni's speech emphasises the importance of unity in the struggle against oppression. The pragmatic implicature is that individual efforts are insufficient in the face of systemic injustice, and only through collective action can meaningful change be achieved. This speech promotes the idea of solidarity as a crucial element in the resistance movement, encouraging cooperation and mutual support among the oppressed. By advocating for unity, Abeni helps to forge a collective identity and purpose among the characters, strengthening their resolve.

As the narrative progresses, Ade's condemnation of injustice provides a moral imperative for action. He boldly proclaims, "How can we remain silent when injustice reigns? When the cries of the oppressed go unheard, and the powerful continue to exploit? Silence is complicity, and we must speak out." (16) Ade's speech is a powerful condemnation of the prevailing injustices

and a call to break the silence. The pragmatic implicature here is that remaining silent in the face of injustice is tantamount to being complicit in it. This speech challenges the audience to recognize their moral responsibility to speak out against exploitation and oppression, highlighting the ethical imperative of vocal resistance. Ade's words serve as a catalyst for the characters to confront their fears and take a stand, reinforcing the play's central theme of moral courage.

Reflecting on the high stakes of their struggle, Funmi's reflection on sacrifice honors those who have given their lives for the cause. She solemnly remarks, "Freedom comes at a cost, and many have paid the ultimate price. We honor their sacrifice by continuing the struggle, by ensuring their deaths were not in vain." (16) Funmi's speech reflects on the sacrifices made by those who have fought for freedom. The pragmatic implicature is a recognition of the heavy toll of the struggle and a call to honor those sacrifices by persevering in the fight for justice. This speech serves to inspire and motivate, reminding the audience of the high stakes and the importance of continued activism to achieve lasting change. By invoking the memory of fallen comrades, Funmi reinforces the characters' commitment to their cause and the enduring nature of their fight for freedom.

Culminating the series of powerful speeches, Olumide's vision of a better future provides a hopeful endpoint for their journey. He envisions, "I dream of a day when our children will live free from fear, when justice will be the norm and not the exception. This dream will become reality if we dare to fight for it." (18) Olumide's speech articulates a hopeful vision of a future free from oppression. The pragmatic implicature is that such a future is attainable, but only through persistent and courageous activism. This speech serves as a beacon of hope, encouraging the audience to persevere in their efforts to create a just and equitable society. It emphasizes the transformative potential of sustained resistance, urging the characters and the audience alike to keep striving for a better world.

The speech in *Red Is the Freedom Road* are rich with pragmatic implicature, each reflecting different facets of protest and activism. Femi's call to action advocates for self-determination, emphasizing the necessity of seizing freedom rather than waiting for it to be granted. Abeni's plea for unity emphasises the power of collective action and solidarity, highlighting the importance of standing together against a common enemy. Ade's condemnation of injustice challenges the audience to recognize the moral imperative to speak out against exploitation,

emphasizing that silence is complicity. Funmi's reflection on sacrifice honors the memory of those who have given their lives for the cause, inspiring continued perseverance in the struggle for justice. Olumide's vision of a better future provides a hopeful endpoint, emphasizing that a just and equitable society is attainable through persistent and courageous activism.

Through these speeches, Osofisan not only conveys the urgency and necessity of the struggle against oppression but also inspires hope and resilience among the oppressed. The pragmatic implicature in each speech serves to motivate, unite, and empower, making the play a significant exploration of the dynamics of resistance. By connecting these themes into the characters' poignant expressions, *Red Is the Freedom Road* offers a timeless reflection on the power of collective action, the moral imperative of resistance, and the enduring hope for a better future.

Discussion of Findings

Femi Osofisan's trilogy—*Women of Owu*, *Morountodun*, and *Red Is the Freedom Road*—vividly illustrates the themes of protest and activism, using powerful speeches to reflect the struggles and resilience of the oppressed. Through these speeches, Osofisan masterfully employs pragmatic implicature to deepen the impact of his characters' words, highlighting the moral and ethical dimensions of their resistance. Each play provides a unique lens through which to examine the dynamics of power, injustice, and the unyielding human spirit.

In *Women of Owu*, the speeches serve as potent expressions of grief and defiance against the backdrop of war and its aftermath. Erelu's confrontation with the invaders, for instance, goes beyond a mere accusation; it exposes the moral hypocrisy of the conquerors who claim divine sanction for their brutal actions. Her speech implicitly questions the legitimacy of their authority and their moral standing. Similarly, Adumaadan's lament about the destruction and suffering challenges the glorification of war, revealing the hollow nature of such rhetoric. This speech implicitly condemns the societal and cultural narratives that celebrate conquest and violence without acknowledging their devastating human costs. By invoking the spirits, Orisaye's speech questions the very foundation of faith and cultural identity, implicating a sense of divine abandonment that stresses the deep existential crisis faced by the Women of Owu. Lawumi's curse and Erelu's defiant declaration, on the other hand, serve as acts of symbolic resistance, suggesting that while physical subjugation is possible, the spirit and will of the oppressed remain unconquered. These speeches collectively affirm the futility of war,

the duplicity of moral justifications for violence, and the unbreakable spirit of those who endure its horrors.

Morountodun shifts the focus to the resistance of the Agbekoya farmers against an oppressive regime, with speeches that articulate a collective struggle for justice and dignity. Titubi's declaration of solidarity with the oppressed farmers not only rejects the government's oppressive labels but also reframes the struggle as a moral imperative. The pragmatic implicature here is that true justice lies with the resistance, not with the authorities who perpetuate exploitation. Marshal's rallying cry further emphasizes the necessity of collective action, implying that liberation is unattainable without unity and active resistance. Alhaja's lament about the disparity between the rich and the poor critiques systemic inequality, implicating the structural injustices that sustain such divisions. Titubi's confrontation with the authorities stresses the futility of trying to silence the truth with violence, suggesting that the spirit of resistance is enduring and transcendent. Lakunle's reflection challenges fatalistic narratives and emphasizes the importance of agency and empowerment, inspiring future generations to continue the struggle. These speeches collectively highlight the moral high ground of the resistance, the importance of unity, and the enduring nature of the fight for justice and equality.

In *Red Is the Freedom Road*, the speeches articulate a broader socio-political struggle, emphasizing themes of unity, sacrifice, and hope for a better future. Femi's call to action rejects the notion of passively waiting for freedom to be granted, instead advocating for active struggle. The pragmatic implicature here is that freedom is a right that must be seized through determined effort. Abeni's plea for unity stresses the strength found in collective action, implying that individual efforts are insufficient against systemic oppression. Ade's condemnation of injustice and call to break the silence implicates the moral responsibility of the oppressed to speak out, suggesting that silence in the face of injustice is complicit. Funmi's reflection on sacrifice honors those who have paid the ultimate price for freedom, emphasizing the need to persevere in their memory. Olumide's vision of a better future serves as a beacon of hope, suggesting that a just society is attainable through sustained activism. These speeches collectively advocate for self-determination, unity, and the ethical imperative of resistance, inspiring hope and resilience among the oppressed.

Across all three plays, Osofisan's use of pragmatic implicature in the speeches serves to deepen the audience's understanding of the characters' struggles and the broader socio-political themes. The speeches in *Women of Owu* challenge the morality of war and highlight the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable suffering. In *Morountodun*, they emphasize the moral high ground of the resistance and the necessity of collective action against systemic injustice. *Red Is the Freedom Road* extends these themes to a broader socio-political context, advocating for unity, sacrifice, and hope in the fight for a just society. Through these speeches, Osofisan not only articulates the urgency and necessity of resistance but also inspires a vision of enduring hope and resilience, making his works significant explorations of the dynamics of protest and activism.

Conclusion

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*, *Morountodun*, and *Red Is the Freedom Road* masterfully utilize pragmatic implicature as a linguistic tool to vividly depict protest and resistance. Through the comprehensive and implicit meanings embedded in the characters' speeches, Osofisan conveys the significant moral, ethical, and socio-political dimensions of their struggles. The pragmatic implicature in these speeches not only enhances the depth of the characters' expressions of grief, defiance, and hope but also challenges the audience to critically engage with themes of justice, unity, and resilience. This linguistic strategy allows Osofisan to articulate challenging narratives of oppression and empowerment, making his plays powerful testaments to the enduring spirit of resistance and the quest for a just society.

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