

Original Paper

Pedagogical Communication in Nigerian Children Literature: A
Pragma-Semiotic Study of Akintayo Oluyinka's *The Greatest
Mistake*

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Abstract

*This study is a cross-disciplinary investigation of the pedagogical significance of children literature in Nigeria—a linguistic study of selected samples from Akintayo Oluyinka's *The Greatest Mistake*. Visual illustrations are typical of children literature because of the age-range of the readers. Hamilton (2000) notes that “children who encounter excellent picture books learn how to read not just the moods but also the pictures. They pay close attention to what they see often discovering things in illustrations.” Like in the literary text we examine in this study, pictorial illustrations in Nigerian children literature have varied contextual underpinnings which make them have meanings to children-readers. This establishes their pragmatic relevance. Objects and gestures convey messages in discourse. Therefore, semiotics is a crucial concern of this study. Hinging on the Pragma-crafting theory, this study concludes that the effectiveness of children literature in the transmission of knowledge to the target readers (children) depends on the skillful use of textual and extra-textual elements of communication.*

Keywords

*children literature, picture, pedagogy, *The Greatest Mistake*, Pragma-crafting theory*

1. Introduction

Children literature (drama, prose poetry) is a veritable instrument for constructing the mindset of the readers. This study investigates the use of pragma-semiotic insights in pictures deployed in children literature. Commenting on the significance of pictures and illustrations in storybooks, Stewing (1980) posits:

“a picture book is a book that provides stories along with pictures. These two elements work together to produce a story with illustrated images. In addition to having interesting and effective verbal aspects,

storybooks must be supported by picture illustrations so that children can grow interested in reading stories. Therefore, images in children's stories must be communicative. In other words, picture books contain stories that are effectively communicated, accompanied by communicative visual illustration designs. The effectiveness of stories in picture books is important, as it ensures the message or meaning of the story is delivered well ...”

This study is restricted to the drama genre. Selected pictures in Akintayo Oluyinka's (2020) *The Greatest Mistake* are subjected to linguistic analysis.

In the play, Bose is the daughter of wealthy parents who do not esteem education. Bose's parents succeeded in making her disregard education and value wealth so much. Our choice of the play (text) is informed by the fact that drama is a literary genre that uses adequate pictures in the presentation of plot.

2. Significance of the Study

Research is evolving on the use of pictures in children literature. However, we do not know of any research effort that investigates children literature from a pragma-semiotic purview. The work of Fletcher and Reese (2005, pp. 64-103) is a conceptual framework on children literature. Fang (1996) examines the pedagogical relevance of children storybooks. The present study is particularly fascinating because it studies the work of a budding (emerging) Nigerian literary writer rather than that of a Nigerian literary writer who is a colossus of the first magnitude in the literary canon.

3. Limitations of the Study

This study is restricted to the drama genre of children literature, even though many works abound on the novel genre of the same kind of literature. However, we note that for an instructive investigation of the pragmatic, semiotic and pedagogical relevance of children literature, the drama genre is very productive, scintillating and crucial, as it extensively deploys actions and pictorial illustrations.

This study examines a few samples of pictorial illustrations taken from different pages of the play, *The Greatest Mistake*. While this approach may be criticized, we contend that it is a satisfactory approach, informed by the Productive Principle (cf. Jolayemi, cited in Acheoah (2011)). The principle states that via selected samples of a literary text, a statement can be made about the entire text. See Austin (1962) for understanding of constatives and performatives. The pictures in *The Greatest Mistake* are neither colorful nor attractive for the lower-age children. However, this study focuses on children that are of appreciable cognitive age. Indeed, the focus is not on lower-age children (Note 1). Although colorful pictures are used to entertain readers, the desire to teach or correct society (Functionalism) is more crucial to literary writers than the culture of literature for entertainment (Note 2).

4. Children Literature

Literature essentially involves reading. According to Suraya Mansure, Radik Sahaja and Endri Endri (2021, p. 6440) “reading is a language skill and an important factor in the learning process ... Through reading, students receive information. Reading is also included as a literacy activity ... Aspects of reading interest in children include a pleasure in the reading activity, an awareness of the benefits of reading, frequency of reading, and the number of books a child has read ... Reading is a typical human activity and ability.” Children literature is a literary text suitable for children. The children may be above lower-age.

Like a novel, a play, such as Akintayo Oluoyinka’s *The Greatest Mistake* essentially tells a story using characterization and language.

Scholars note the relevance of children literature to early child literacy. The elaborate submission of Suraya Mansure, Radik Sahaja and Endri Endri (2021) will suffice for an acceptable understanding of children literature and the use of pictures and illustrations therein:

Children literature is any story that correlates with the world of children (the world understood by children) and uses language that fits children’s intellectual and emotional development (language understood by children). One genre of children’s literature is child fiction ... Picture books are storybooks that display narrative texts verbally and are accompanied by illustrated pictures ... picture books contain stories that are effectively communicated, accompanied by communicative visual illustration designs. The effectiveness of stories in picture books is important, as it ensures the message or meaning of the story is delivered well ... Visual aspects of picture books can be effective to attract children ... and introduce them into the world of literacy ...

In addition, Zainab Zendana Shafii (2015) gives an extensive background on the emergence of children literature in Nigeria:

Many writers of children literature have emerged from Nigeria since the 1960s. Before venturing into the historical development of children literature in Nigeria, it is pertinent to go back to the colonial period. Colonialism, to a large extent, affected the Nigerian society and is considered one of the factors that contributed to the literary development of literature in Nigeria. During the colonial period, the colonial masters embarked on the importation of European books, which in reality were to help propagate and impose their cultural imperialism and propaganda on the people of Nigeria. To this end, before Nigerian children read books written by Nigerians, they had read the classics of Europe: the famous folktales and fairytales collected and popularized by the German academic, Enid Blyton ... Expectations became high in terms of the creation of qualitative children’s books. More attention was paid to the relevant culture content that would help in the nurture, education and entertainment of the Nigerian child. The spirit of independence was pervasive and writers were not left out in the quest for excellence in cultural production. Some books on children literature were produced by writers including Cyprian Ekwensi, who was heavily influenced by the writings of the West. Berth Lindfors stated in his seminal book, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature* that early in his literary career, Ekwensi was

not only influenced by western juvenile books, but also borrowed from classics, like *Treasure Island* ... Ekwensi also authored other children books like *The Drummer Boy* (1966), *The Passport of Mallam Illia* (1965) ... (Note 3) Publishing companies further helped in the growth and emergence of children literature in Nigeria. Between 1960 and 1980, book publishing flourished under a number of publishing companies that started different series. The African University Press's Reader's Library Series; Nelson's Rapid Readers; Longman's Library and Macmillan Pacesetters Series, also accelerated the publication of fiction for young people ... Children literature has witnessed a large and massive improvement during this period ... The storybooks came under the following categories: Adventure Series, Folktales Series and Heroes Series. There are also small but active publishing companies that contributed immensely to the growth of children literature.

Indeed, from historical point of view, children literature is an instrument for teaching children civil behavior and morals. This is why pictures deployed therein are potently communicative. According to M, Sencer Bulut Ozsezer and H. Beyza Canbazoglu (2018, pp. 205-217), "there must be a connection between illustration and text. If there is no connection between them, it can cause contradiction in the child. Another function of the pictures in the children's story books is to shed light on the written script ... In this context, the pictures are ... colorful, engaging, concrete, entertaining and interpretive; the pictures are correlated to the subject and the text ... The pictures contribute to the development of the children's sensory perceptions because they convey emotions and thoughts that are beyond expression with words ... In this context, the importance of illustrated children's books should not be ignored for the development of artistic and aesthetic concerns, and for language and cognitive development in children (Note 4)."

5. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a field of language study. *The Encyclopedia Americana* (1994) defines pragmatics as "the subfield of the study of language that investigates the techniques by which language is processed for communication purposes." According to Crystal and Varley (1993) "pragmatics is the study of the factors that govern our choice of language (sounds, construction, words) in social interaction, and the effects of our choice upon others. The subject includes the cooperation in our speaking behavior and it thus involves using language to convey politeness, intimacy, playfulness, rudeness, awkwardness and a range of other social attributes.

Austin (1962) submits that crucial concepts in pragmatics include: participants (users of language in context); speech acts (*locutionary act* which is an utterance with determinate sense and reference; *illocutionary act* which is the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence by virtue of the conventional force associated with it; and *perlocutionary act* which is the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence) context (the relevant aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance or discourse); non-verbal communication (non-linguistic communication); inference (the process of making logical conclusions from all that a particular context

provides to arrive at what a speaker means); presupposition (facts that the participants of discourse take for granted in a particular context of communication); and shared knowledge (common background information shared by the participants of discourse). For more insights on pragmatics, see Levinson (1983), Adegbija (1982), Adegbija (1999), Mey (2001), Grice (1975) and Searle (1969).

6. Semiotics

Semiotics (or semiology) is a wide field of language study. It embraces almost every aspect of human interaction as almost anything in the society can be a significant sign meaningful to the special community, even if it is ideologically coded (cf. Barthes, 1967). For effective interpretation of texts, symbols, signs and icons which have socio-cultural relevance have to be understood.

Terence Hawkes (1977) opines that the major constraints of any social practice lie in the fact that it signifies. In other words, “every speech act includes the transmission of message through the languages of gesture, posture, clothing, hairstyle, perfume, accent, social context, etc., over and above, under and beneath, even at cross purposes with what words actually say.” Semiotics is studied through semiosis, which is “the process of making and using signs” (Sless, 1986). Theoretical concepts in semiotics are the “signifier” and the “signified”. Figure 1 (cf. Alabi, 1995) below shows the relationship of the triad:

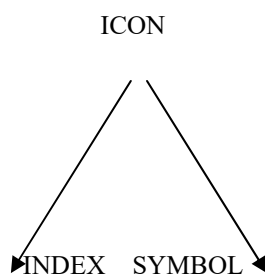


Figure 1. Relationship of the Signifier and the Signified

In the icon, the sign resembles its object and has a relationship of signifier and signified in similarity of resemblance proposed by the sign and acknowledged fully, by the receiver. Thus, a painting has an iconic relationship to its subject because it resembles it. An index needs not resemble the subject but must be connected with it physically, most often, or through contiguity. The relationship is concrete, actual and sequential. In this sense, the pointing finger (index) relates to the object pointed to ... The existing relationship between the sign and the object in a symbol, is arbitrary, conventional and unmotivated by any physical connection or similarities like the written language to its spoken form. They become related by virtue of a law, habit, rule, general ideas or conventions (cf. Hawkes, 1977), Sless (1986) and Alabi (1995).

Central to the study of signs is the idea of relation; all signs stand in relation to something else. In other words, the signs stand for the object either as an icon, a symbol or as qualisigns (sinsigns or legisigns) which are terms used in advanced studies in semiotics (cf. Alabi, 1995).

Textual analysis examines a specific text and considers the process by which it signifies since reading (a semiotic term for all manner of perceiving, including, hearing, sensing, feeling, seeing, analyzing, etc.) is a subjective act. Textual analysis explains the codes through which signification takes place as perceived by the investigation.

7. Theoretical Framework

The Pragma-crafting theory (cf. Acheoah, 2015, pp. 21-32) explains the use of “P-crafting Features” in processing the meaning of verbal and non-verbal communication. Concepts in the theory include: Geoimplicatures (GIs), Linguistic Implicatures (LIs), Behavioural Implicatures (BIs), Contextual Presuppositions (CPs), Pragmadedviants (PDs), Object Referred (OR) and Operative Language (OL). See Acheoah (2015) for elaborate perspectives on the theory, including the diagram. The concepts that anchor the theory are briefly explained below:

- i. Setting: This is the physical context of a communicative event in both immediate and remote (referential) sense.
- ii. Theme: This is the message conveyed by Text.
- iii. Sociolinguistic Variables: They are meanings conveyed by age, cultural background, social status, race, gender, relationships, etc.
- iv. Psychological Acts: These are the different emotions expressed through linguistic and extra-linguistic acts.
- v. Inference: Inference-making has to do with making logical deductions from available linguistic and extra-linguistic components of Text.
- vi. Indexicals: They are grammatical categories that have the potential to establish the relationship between language and context.
- vii. Shared Contextual Knowledge: This refers to pieces of information available to participants of an on-going discourse, for effective communication.
- viii. Emergent Context: It is any emergent situation in an on-going communicative event. It redirects the performance and interpretation of subsequent linguistic, extra-linguistic and psychological acts. An emergent context becomes “Shared Knowledge of Emergent Context” when it translates into common knowledge of the participants of discourse.
- ix. Geoimplicature: It was coined from “geographical” and “implicature”, and refers to verbal and non-verbal practices that are restricted to race and geographical (physical) boundary. They are not universal human practices.
- x. Linguistic Implicature: It is any meaning implied through language.
- xi. Behavioural Implicature: It is any meaning conveyed by extra-linguistic and psychological acts.
- xii. Contextual Presupposition: This is a product of shared contextual knowledge.
- xiii. Background Assumptions: In an on-going communication, participants deduce meanings from verbal and non-verbal data. Such meanings are referred to as Background Assumptions (BAs).

xiv. Pragmadeviants: They are deviant expressions used by participants of discourse, as illocutionary strategies.

xv. Interactive Participant: This is an interlocutory participant who performs linguistic, extra-linguistic and psychological acts, as communicative contributions that do not only impinge on the interpretive process, but also determine or generate sequels (perlocutionary acts).

xvi. Non-interactive Participant: A non-interactive participant does not participate in an on-going communicative event, but is intentionally or accidentally present in the physical context.

8. Methodology

The analysis done in this study is restricted to the three samples of selected pictorial representations taken from the play. The major parameter for selection is “quality of pragmatic and semiotic features”. The samples are presented as Datum 1 to Datum 3. An integrative textual analysis is done, drawing insights from pragmatics, semiotics, pedagogy and literary theories, as they apply to the theoretical anchorage of the study (the Pragma-crafting theory).

8.1 Presentation of Data

See the appendix section of this paper for the three samples analyzed (in section 8.2 below):

8.2 Analysis of Data

Datum 1

The picture in Datum 1 captures the setting of the discourse (school assembly). The participants are: Yemisi’s mother, a male teacher, a female teacher and Yemi’s classmates. Hinging on the Pragma-crafting theory, the Contextual Objects (CO) include: classroom building, school hall, the Nigerian national flag, a report card and a whip. These objects impinge on the message in one way or the other. For example, the whip that the teacher holds helps the reader to infer why Yemi is crying; she is being beaten by the teacher. It is instructive that the picture presents the readers’ universal expectation, which is that a teacher, not a student, is holding the whip. The whip is a semiotic representation of authority (status). Visual artists are conscious of children’s psyche, feelings and routine. Such consciousness enables the artists to use theme-driven pictures and illustrations vividly in children literature. The pictures are impressionistic and align with children’s cognitive potentials. By using appropriate pictorial representations, artists help the young readers develop their mental and linguistic abilities. For example, in Datum 1, which shows that no student is laughing, the readers work out the psychological context, and infer that the discourse is a serious one. Scholars opine that the psychological context of a communicative event is important for a meaningful interpretation of the event. In this datum, the flag is positioned high above the students, thus making the readers ponder on nationhood, patriotism and other ethics of society which they are often taught in schools (civil education). This datum which makes it clear that Yemi altered the results in her report card (forgery) “interacts” with perceived connotations of the Nigerian national flag: brotherhood, fatherland, sovereignty, nation-building, honesty, morality and diligence. The young readers are taught these values

via children literature. For example, the picture shows that the students are properly dressed. Dressing code is part of school morals. These illustrations help the readers understand and explore their world appropriately. They make meanings from the context as depicted in the experiences of the characters. Given the fact that children are in the developing stage in life, pictures are crucial in moral instructions. Artistic consciousness deployed in children literature promotes the creativity of the readers. Pictures in children literature should be appropriate for the age of the readers. The Pragma-crafting theory contends that age is a crucial sociolinguistic variable for the interpretation of textual meaning. Children interpret pictures in literary texts by relating such pictures to environmental (societal) realities. For example, if the picture in Datum 1 shows that the teachers are not properly dressed, a Behavioural Implicature (BI) will be generated. The young readers view their teachers as role models and leaders. Good leadership is exemplary. In this datum, we see the female teachers spread their hands to signify their disapproval of Yemi's misconduct (altering her results). In the Pragma-crafting theory, gestures constitute "semiotic particulars". The picture shows that Yemi who committed the crime is kneeling rather than standing. It is also instructive that the students are not behind the scene. The young readers expect this in the universe of discourse (captured as Macro World Knowledge in the Pragma-crafting theory). To show pragmatic communication between verbal and extra-verbal elements, the illustration in this datum is entitled: *Yemi is being beaten on the assembly for altering her report card.*

Different pragmatic principles (P-crafting features) are explored by young readers to interpret the setting and theme of datum 1. For example, by coming to report Yemi in her school, it can be inferred that Yemi's mother is a disciplinarian—an upright woman (Behavioural Implicature). She is not one of those parents who "spoil" their children or come to school to fight teachers for subjecting their children to disciplinary measures. Writers of children literature in Nigeria are conscious of the crimes children commit, and therefore write to lampoon and correct the young readers. Some children are involved in gambling. There are also children who leave home for other places, and still pretend to be in school. The characters in Nigerian literature essentially speak the writer's mind or worldview. Yemi's mother's sudden appearance on the scene is an Emergent Context which relocates locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. See Austin (1962) for speech act typology. In Datum 1, it is clear that the setting, participants and Contextual Objects (COs) are in tandem with the world knowledge of the young readers: wall, window and hall. It would be illogical and unacceptable if:

- a. the pictorial illustration in this datum presents a young girl as Yemi's mother;
- b. the students on the assembly ground are not facing their teachers;
- c. the picture shows a football pitch (revealing goal-post, football, etc.). This datum is taken from Act One Scene One, and the linguistic expressions that align with the semiotic (extra-linguistic elements) are:

- a. *Students of Academy International College standing on the assembly ground for morning devotion* (p. 1).
- b. *Yemi's mother, Tomilola drags her daughter to the assembly* (p. 1).

- c. *She must be punished seriously* (p. 1).
- d. *Her mother brought her to school in order to report her* (p. 1).
- e. *This is the report card she altered* (p. 3).

Datum 2

Datum 2 presents father, mother and their daughter (Yemi). The physical context of the discourse (setting) is appropriate in terms of participants, locutionary and illocutionary acts. This submission corroborates Austin's (1962) term known as "felicity condition". In the picture, Yemi's hand is on her father's shoulder to demonstrate that she is proud of her performance. Yemi's mother spreads her hands to show satisfaction. She is satisfied that Yemi actually performed excellently in her examination, and did not falsify her results. Yemi's father's posture reveals his psychological condition. He goes through the report card with immense interest. He is engrossed in this extra-linguistic act because he wants to be sure that his daughter did not alter her results as usual. The picture shows that Yemi still wears her school uniform. This implies that she arrived home not long ago (Behavioural Implicature).

The pedagogical inclinations of Nigerian children literature are usually immersed in the use of physical contexts to convey verbal elements of transmitting knowledge to the young children. In children literature, the contextual underpinnings of pictures are directed towards the young readers' cognitive stimuli. Pedagogical theories reveal that learning is an agent-receiver phenomenon. M. Sencer Bulut Ozsezer and H. Beyza Canbazoglu (2018, p. 205) cite Piaget who opines that "learning theories need contexts in which an individual can reason and make meaning in order to be able to develop cognitively ... seeing is an active function of the mind whereas perception is a cognitive event; ultimately emphasizes that interpretation and meaning are integral parts of the act of seeing. This experience is much more efficient for the individual experiencing pictorial products. It needs to be stimulated both intuitively and cognitively in order for the mind to function fully. In this context, painting offers an excellent opportunity for education. This allows the individual to see not only the parts but also the whole."

The pictorial illustrations in Datum 2 is entitled: *Yemi's father going through her report card*. The young readers of Nigerian literature invoke social phenomena to interpret the verbal and non-verbal communication therein. For example, the readers invoke the fact that parents are usually happy when their children perform well in school examinations. This explains why some parents buy the children gifts. The young readers place themselves in Yemi's situation as part of the inferential process. Datum 2 shows that Yemi's parents are smiling. Therefore, the Emergent Context (the fact that Yemi suddenly comes home with good results) redirects illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in the communication event. In the Pragma-crafting theory, "smiling" is a semiotic element of communication. "Crying" conveys sorrow/pain while "smiling" conveys different psychological conditions: joy (The family is happy about the results); satisfaction (The family is satisfied because the good results were not false); or pride (Yemi was proud of the good results that her own efforts produced). Readers of Nigerian Children literature ask critical questions in the process of interpreting verbal and non-verbal elements

of communication in such literary texts:

- i. What can you see in the pictures?
- ii. What are the things happening in the pictures?
- iii. Are there other inferences you can logically use the pragmatic underpinnings (background knowledge) to make from the illustrations?
- iv. What reasons can you give for your inferences?

The page-layout of *The Greatest Mistake* is effective, as evident in this datum. In spite of the small size of the book, the entire space was almost used up. M. Sencer Bulut Ozsezer and H. Beyza Canbazoglu (2018) submit that “page layout is an important factor in illustrated children books. In children’s publications, it is very important to arrange pictures and text, to arrange the lines and headings, to set the upper and lower margins. You opt for pages with regular wide margins on the edges of the pages.”

Given the fact that the picture in Datum 2 is about Yemi’s good performance in her examinations, it would have been wrong for the pictorial illustrations to show that Yemi is crying. The linguistic expressions that convey what we see in the pictorial illustrations are in Act Two Scene Three:

- a. *I cannot see any red ink in your card at all* (p. 21).
- b. *I got second position in my class* (p. 21).
- c. *Yes, mama. I read a lot because I wanted to make you proud* (p. 21).
- d. *Don’t be deceived again. Do you know if she has done the same thing she did last term? ... Yes, you did well. This second position is true; throughout this week you will be eating pounded yam in this house* (pp. 22-23)

In d, there is a conversational implicature (cf. Grice, 1975). The expression “This second position is true” implies that there was an antecedent in which Yemi did not present the true results. Within the framework of the Pragma-crafting theory, the adverbial “again” is a Linguistic Implicature because it is suggestive of the fact that the action predicated had taken place before.

As a semiotic element of communication, “pounded yam” signifies “enjoyment”, “pleasure” or “high-class meal”. It is used as a “trophy” for Yemi, because she took second position in class.

Datum 3

In Datum 3, the participants of discourse are: Bose and her friends (Moni and Yemi), sellers and buyers. The discourse is situated in a market. The picture reveals different Contextual Objects: tables (for selling products), cutlass (on a table), goods (on tables) and electricity poles (which is suggestive of a modern market). The Pragma-crafting theory explains that Contextual Objects are not only setting-suggestive, but also determine the interpretation of texts. They determine the exploration of P-crafting Features (implicatures, presuppositions, background knowledge, etc.). Young readers of the literature use their cognitive stimuli to infer that in Datum 2, the topic of discourse could vary: while the sellers and buyers may be discussing prices of commodities and daily turnover, the students (Bose, Moni and Yemi) may be talking about academic matters and their future. Two of the girls hold shopping bags and the readers can therefore infer that these girls are not traders. One of the girls is

folding her hands (not carrying a bag). This implies that she simply accompanied the other two girls to the market rather than being there to buy something. The picture shows that the traders' products are not displayed on tables as expected by the readers. Considering the way the products are arranged on tables, it can be inferred that the traders are set for departure as the day's business comes to an end. The semiotics of "time" is communicated—the discourse occurs in the evening. In children literature, pictures are used with subtle scientific inclinations in the sense that such pictures logically, systematically and pragmatically foreground the "romance" between textual and extra-textual elements of communication. Interestingly, M. Sencer Bulut Ozsezer and H. Beyza Canbozoglu (2018) note that "... well written pictorial storybooks in accordance with the child's developmental levels support the development of children scientific process skills ... Yazzie ... has determined a strong connection between visual-special reasoning and academic achievement in children aged eight to twelve years ...". Datum 3 shows that as the girls discuss, one of them frowns (facial gesture), and this semiotic input suggests that there is an on-going argument that heightens her provocation. Terrence Hawkes (1977) views facial gestures as potent semiotic elements of communication. There are expressions (in Act Three Scene Two) that are in tandem with the pictures in the datum:

- a. *It is already evening. Bose, Moni and Yemi are coming from the market. They are chatting* (p. 30).
- b. *If you want to take the first position, you must work and pray harder* (p. 31).
- c. *You Moni want to be a medical doctor in the future ...* (p. 32).

The process of using or interpreting pictures in children literature is not arbitrary. It requires skills given the fact that pictures change the meaning of texts when they are altered. For example, if Datum 3 presents a crowd in the market scene, the young readers may not conclude that it was closing time. The picture in this datum is entitled: *Bose, Moni and Yemi are coming from the market* (p. 31).

According to M. Sencer Bulut Ozsezer (2018, p. 212) "studies show that ... reading, understanding and interpreting pictures is at least as difficult as literacy ... In addition, experts in this field also stated that reading a picture is a much different process than reading a writing.

9. Discussion

A pragma-semiotic analysis of the pictorial representations in *The Greatest Mistake* shows the logical relationship between the writer's message (theme) and the use of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements of communication. Radik Sahaja and Endri Endri (2021) posit that "pictures in children literature must match the theme, setting, characterization and plot in the story ... Good picture books can provide children with fun/entertainment and aesthetic experiences ..." Fang (1996) contends that illustrations in children literature interact with text. We align with this submission because the low cognitive or mental ability of young readers presupposes that illustrations should be used to amplify and simplify the verbal elements therein. According to Zainab Zendana Shafii (2015), "the level of individual understanding is highly dependent on the mental picture from any object or particular thing to serve as a visible (visual) sample. Thus, it is not in doubt that the child's art or literary form is

inevitable of pictorial criteria, which in all ways pronounces the textual inscriptions from page to page. Though the textual and photographic literature can be independently used in the literary field, the blend of the two and especially the illustrative pictures makes up a unique whole. However, the level of literary taste, anticipation and expectation of children literature differs as far as the reader's brain, which is not fully developed like that of adult. To this extent therefore, the relationship between illustration and text becomes inevitable in the art of children literature." Readers equate the value of a literary text not only with the standard of the diction used, but also with the quality of illustrations. Interestingly, the strong interaction between text and illustration in the mental process of children readers makes it necessary for the visual artists to use quality and skill-driven illustrations in children literature. Zainab Zendana Shafii (2015) reports Voight who opines that "literature in itself is an art form. Carefully chosen words point visuals upon a page for the theatre of the mind. This has often inspired other more visually oriented artists to create tangible objects based on these mental images. Not only can this create a more fully realized piece of art, it also allows these artists to produce content based on other interpretations ...". In the field semantics, the Meaning as Mental Image Theory views the meaning of a word as the mental image that such a word conjures in the hearer's mind when it is uttered. Perhaps, this explains the inevitable role of illustrations in children literature in Nigeria. Hammerberg, cited in Zeinab Zendana Shafii (2015) contends that "words appear in pictures and over pictures in ways that require a non-literal reading of the printed text, for to only read the words for their meaning would be to escape with no meaning whatsoever." In a similar vein, Nikolajeva and Scott, cited in Zeinab Zendana Shafii (2015) note that "the relationship between text and illustration could be symmetrical: that is when illustration correlates with text. In this case, the illustration reflects what is told in the text rather than adding any new meaning or nuances. The second type of relationship is that of augmentation. This is a situation whereby illustrations enhance or extend the text or give a new meaning that has not been expressed in the text. The illustration thus: provides critical information that lends meaning to the story as a whole. The text depends on pictures for clarification; illustration enhances, elaborates text, while text carries primary narrative. The third is that of contradiction, that is when illustrations present a meaning contrary to the text ... To an extent the relationship between the text and illustrations are played out in structural definition and literary vindication of the various characters. The reader gets to see the pictorial reactions and actions of the characters viz-a-viz the textual constructions ...". The use of pictorial illustrations in Akintayo Oluyinka's (2020) *The Greatest Mistake* shows that indeed, in Nigerian children literature, components of meaning that are not covertly expressed in verbal text are deduced by the readers via presented illustrations. Sipe, cited in Zainab Zendana Shafii (2015) asserts that "'synergistic relationship' in which a combined effect of the verbal and visual components is greater than the sum of their separate effects and depends not only on the union of the verbal text and the visual text but also on the perceived interaction or transaction between these two components ... synergy of words and pictures works in a picture book in any case, whether the visual text expands, amplifies, compliments, anticipates, interprets, counterpoints or contradicts the

visual text. Every reading can reveal new layers of meaning as the reader develops.” In Nigerian children literature, pictures are used to convey different actions as the plot unfolds. This is evident in the play text analyzed in this study; while the preceding picture shows Yemi being beaten for altering her report card, the subsequent picture shows her smiling because she eventually took second position in class. Commenting on children’s attitude to actions deployed in literary texts as conveyed by illustrations, Tina Harlon (2006) opines that “... the main feature of children is action and optimistic effect.” Young readers of the literature relate actions with environment as they process text and illustrations for meaning. Often there is a semantic relationship between the object and the words, and this explains how pictures contribute to language learning in children, depending on their different stages of cognitive development. Pictorial illustrations in children literature are interpreted via intuitive and cognitive prowess. This produces comprehensive inference. However, the ability of children to process illustrations for meaning is not as high as that of adult readers. For this reason, we align with Akintayo Oluyinka (2020), who has done well in this regard. The use of inflated language and complex illustrations distort meaning in the mind of young readers of the play. Critics believe that there are many literary texts that are christened “children literature”, but are not appropriate for young readers not just in terms of language or illustrations, but also because of unsuitable characterization and inappropriate thematic concerns such as crimes and immorality. Hamilton (2000) submits that “characters in picture storybooks are often children or adolescents, depending on the intended audience. They reflect the actions, thoughts and emotions of children and adolescents in the narration. ... Children’s books are supposed to be written in a simple form to be easily understandable by children. In other words, children’s books need to fulfill a certain level of legibility ... A text can be categorized as legible if each symbol or character is easy to identify ...” (cited in Radik Sahaja & Endri Endri, 2021).

In using linguistic and extra-linguistic (pictures) elements language to communicate discrete messages in Nigerian children literature, the writer and artists are engaged in pragma-semiotic task. In Nigerian children literature, children-related themes are conveyed to the child-reader via simple diction and enchanting visual illustrations. Although the language in Akintayo Oluyinka’s (2020) *The Greatest Mistake* is simple, it arouses the readers’ emotions and impacts positively on them. The writer’s language is essentially like utterances deployed in writer-reader conversational turns. U. Lehtsalu et al. (1973) posit that “besides communicating certain ideas an utterance may also produce a definite effect or arouse an emotion in the listener or reader.” A pragma-semiotic study of the use of pictures in children literature is a crucial investigation of the role of pictures in the genre. The meanings of pictorial illustrations are the totality of how they are interpreted and understood by young readers.

The dominant P-crafting feature explored by young readers in the interpretation of pictorial illustrations is writer-reader shared knowledge. Hammerberg, cited in Zeinab Zendana Shafii (2015) asserts that “the function of the author is to guide the reader about a shared or common experience and suggest meaning as the story unfolds.” See Acheoah (2015) who categorizes shared knowledge thus: Shared

Contextual Knowledge, (SKK), Shared Macro Knowledge (SMK) and Shared Knowledge of Emergent Context (SKEC). Adegbija's (1982) pragmatic theory explains that participants' background knowledge (mutual contextual beliefs) does not only facilitate the use of verbal and non-verbal means of communication, but also enhances the interpretation of messages in varied contexts.

While processing visual illustrations in children literature, the readers demonstrate the thrust of pragmatics which is "processing linguistic and extra-linguistic acts for meanings".

In teaching morals via children literature, the writer explores a crucial pragmatic tool (implicature) by expecting the readers to interpret the message from environmental, individualistic experiences. Scholars hold the view that implicature essentially involves mind-reading, and there is no limit to inference-making. Adegbija (1999) posits that "inference involves the drawing of a conclusion from known or assumed facts or statements, from available data or a particular premise. It is the deductive process through which the addressee or reader progresses from the literal meaning of an utterance to what the speaker/writer actually intends to express. The context of an utterance is often very crucial in making the appropriate inference. Inferences are made on the basis of the background context, our experience of life or world knowledge, and the mutually shared beliefs. Knowledge of the literal meaning of an utterance often contributes to appropriate inference that will lead us to the non-literal meaning."

This study acknowledges the crucial role of visual artists in the effective transmission of knowledge to young readers of Nigerian children literature. The literature of this genre aligns with this submission. Conkey and Christine (1990) hold the view that the message of the visual artist is "inclusive of subjective vocabularies, always accompanied by illustrations, so that there can be no doubt about what exists objectively."

10. Conclusion

This study examines children literature from a cross-disciplinary approach, and shows the place of linguistics in the explanation of verbal (language) and non-verbal (pictures) communication that are deployed in children literature in Nigeria. In writing children literature, writers explore the five senses of "touch", "sound", "sight", "smell" and "taste". The pedagogical potency of pictures is determined by how well such pictures are sense-evoking. The critical question that can be asked is: What can the child-reader see, smell, touch or taste from the environment on visualizing the pictures, besides reading the linguistic inputs? The pedagogical worth of *The Greatest Mistake* is accentuated by the playwright's level of originality in the use of pictures.

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Notes

Note 1. The cover page of *The Greatest Mistake* is colorful and attractive. Although the in-text pictures are like mere sketches (typical of many cartoons), they incredibly convey the writer's message.

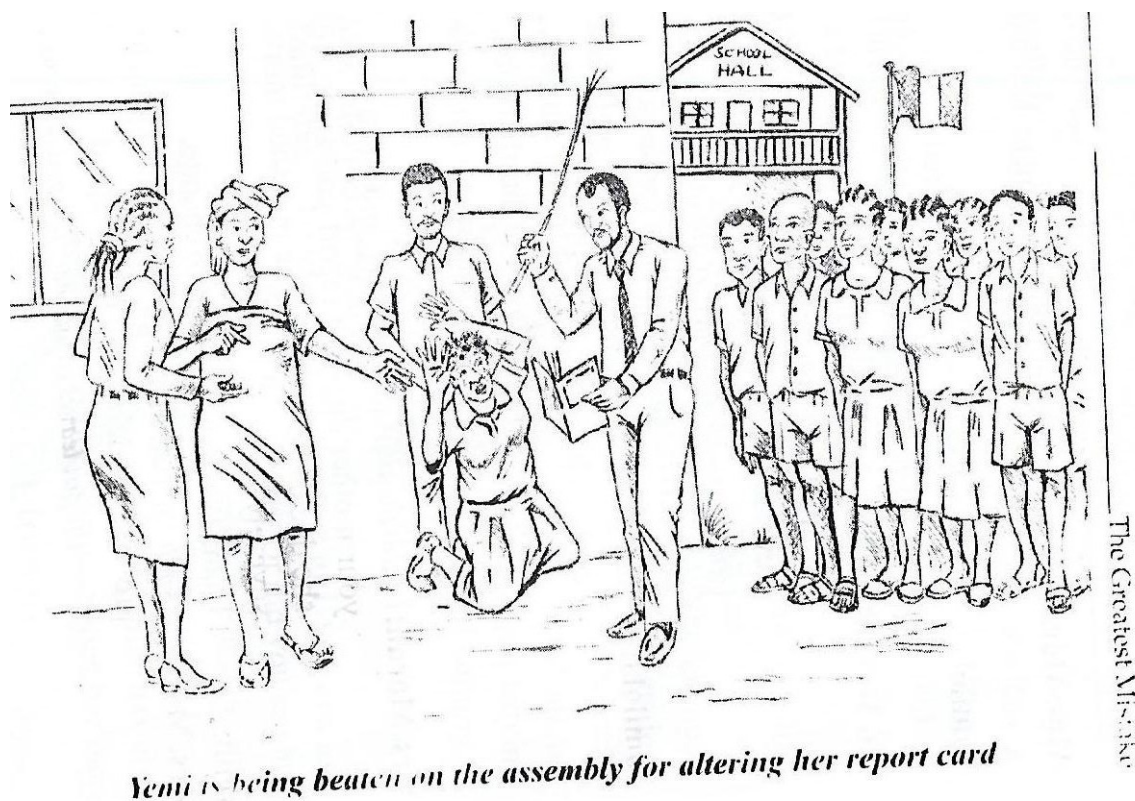
Note 2. The utilitarian perspective of literature is known as Functionalism. It applies to Nigerian children literature. Functionalism fundamentally captures the social relevance of literary writings.

Note 3. As noted by the writer, there are other popular authors of children literature in Nigeria: Chinua Achebe who wrote *Chike and the River* and Mabel Segun who authored *My Father's Daughter*.

Note 4. See Fletcher and Reese (2005) for more insights on the importance visual illustrations in children literature.

Appendix

Datum 1



Datum 2



Yemi's Father going through her report card

The Greatest Mistake

Datum 3

