

# A Pragmatic Study of Abdicating

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## Abstract

This research analyzes, pragmatically, the concept of *abdicating*. Its aim is to reveal how this concept is utilised in literature. It is based on the hypothesis that: 1- The speech act of (assertive, declarative, directive and expressive) can be used to express the sense of abdicating. 2- Grice's cooperative principle is frequently observed in the epic. 3- Many devices such as metaphor, repetition are used in the epic. In order to achieve the aims of the research, the steps are followed: 1. Reviewing the literature about abdicating, the poet and the epic itself. Some pragmatic notions such as speech acts, the cooperative principle, and some devices such as metaphor, repetition are also reviewed, since they are relevant to the aims of the study. 2. Analyzing five texts according to a model developed for this study. This study is limited to analyze texts from the epic "*Song of Lawino*". It is written by the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek 1966 .

## 1. Introduction

Merriam Webster (2018) defines *Abdicating* as follows: 1- To abdicate means: to renounce a throne, high office dignity, or function e.g : *The king was forced to bdicat*. 2- To cast off: Discard . abdicate a responsibility. It is the act of abdicating; the renunciation of a high office, dignity, or trust, by its holder; commonly the voluntary renunciation of sovereign power, authority,( Webster Dictionary 2018). On the other hand, the Cambridge Dictionary defines *abdicate* as: 1- If a king or a queen abdicates, he or she makes a formal statement that he or she no longer wants to be king or queen. 2- To stop controlling or managing something that you are in charge of , *She abdicated all responsibility for project* . The origin of the word comes dates back to Mid-16<sup>th</sup> century from Latin *abdicate* 'renounced' , from the verb *abdicate* , from *ab-*'away ,from *+dicare* 'declare' (Oxford Dictionary). Abdication is the act of formally relinquishing monarchical authority. Abdications have played various roles in the succession procedures of monarchies. While some cultures have viewed abdication as an extreme abandonment of duty, in other societies (such as pre-Meiji Restoration Japan), abdication was a regular event, and helped maintain stability during political succession.

Historically, abdications have either occurred by force (where the regent was forced to abdicate on pain of death or other severe consequences) or voluntarily. Some rulers are ruled to have abdicated in absentia, vacating the physical throne and thus their position of power, although these judgments were generally pronounced by successors with vested interest in seeing the throne abdicated, and often without or despite the direct input of the abdicating monarch. (web source 2). It is worth mentioning that it is part of speech acts (web source 3).

Abdicating has many senses and many interpretations but it has other senses like: *abdicating responsibility* . It is defined as: failure to do what is required by duty or responsibility. In relationships, it can take on many forms: unwillingness for contributing to, or making decisions; not taking on a fair share of duties; and not taking responsibility for ones' own actions ( Silvers , 2014 ).

According to Wilson (1999: 15), "Abdicating responsibility denotes a cognitive decision, an acknowledgment that the individual choose not to assume any moral , financial, social or other obligation in how he or she treats a victim ". This study attempts to clarify the senses of abdicating in Okot P 'Bitek's *SONG OF LAWENO*. How he has abdicated his morals, principles, religion and even his wife for the sake of another women, fascinated by the colonizer's modernity. This study aims at:

1. Identifying the speech act of abdicating:
2. Showing how the poet uses Grice's Maxims in the chosen data.
3. Analyzing the rhetorical devices used.

## 2. The Epic and the Poet

### 2.1 The Poet: Biography

Okot p'Bitek (7 June 1931 – 20 July 1982) was a Ugandan poet, who achieved wide international recognition for *Song of Lawino*, a long poem dealing with the tribulations of a rural African wife whose husband has taken up urban life and wishes everything to be westernised. *Song of Lawino* was originally written in the Acholi language, and self-translated to English, and published in 1966. It was a breakthrough work, creating an audience among anglophone Africans for direct, topical poetry in English; and incorporating traditional attitudes and thinking in an accessible yet faithful literary vehicle. It was followed by the pendant *Song of Ocol* (1970), the husband's reply. ( web source 3) , ( Bitek , 2009 : 2)

### 2.2 The Epic

"*Song of Laweno*" is an epic poem . First published in 1966 in Acholi Luo, it was quickly translated into other

languages, including English. It has become one of the most widely read literary works originating from Sub-Saharan Africa.

The lengthy prose poem of Bitek, often categorized as poetic novels, reflect the traditional Acholi songs, while expressing contemporary political themes (web source 4).

### 2.3 Themes

One of the major themes in Okot's *Song of Lawino* is that of tradition versus modernization, the loss of culture at the expense of progress. We see this in the two characters Lawino and Ocol. Ocol has a very derogatory view of Africans and their culture believing that it holds back the people. Lawino is of another mind and tries to show Ocol all that is good in their culture. The two clash literally, physically, and philosophically to present this theme (Web source 5).

In this epic, the poet presents the heated conflict between modern civilization and old tradition. (Muliro, 2007:1). Okot is surely not weeping for the primitive, savage past culture, but he is concerned with portraying the positive values of African traditions. Again he cares for some common changes that took place as a result for western colonization of Africa, (Wanambisi, 1981: 27).

Okot's whole career as poet,...singer... has been concerned with the problem of making tradition meaningful to modernity and avoiding Western solutions to African problems, (Ezuma, 1975).

### 3. The Pragmatic Perspective of Abdicating

The notion of speech acts is central to abdicating. Many verbs have this sense such as; give up, concede, cede, waive, relinquish, surrender, let down, concession. These verbs are used due to the fact that they perform the same notion. Searle (1969) distinguished many types of speech acts: representative (truth claims), directives (commands, requests), commissives (promise, threats), expressive (praising, blaming), declaratives (proclaiming giving up morals, announcing another marriage). Speech acts can only be effectively performed under certain conditions 'felicity conditions' which in this case of abdicating, may include conditions such as power or status of the husband, aggression and injustice in treating his wife. The style of language is another important condition.

### 4. The Model of Analyses

This section presents an eclectic model to clarify most of the pragmatic aspects such as speech acts, Grice's Maxims and some rhetorical devices such as; metaphor, and repetition that can be used in the epic to illustrate abdicating. These aspects are as follows:

#### 4.1 The Cooperative Principle

Mey (2009:106) states that the Grecian approach regarded cooperation as the ruling element of verbal communication. As the same, Grice (1975) argued that what people say automatically create expectations that guide the hearer towards what the speaker means. So communication is considered rational and co-operative as well. He continues saying that human communicators must follow specific maxims in their verbal messages. These maxims are as follows:

##### **Maxim of quality:**

- 1-Do not say what you believe to be false.
- 2-Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

##### **Maxim of Quantity:**

- 1-Make your contribution as informative as required.
- 2-Do not make your contribution more informative than required

##### **Maxim of Relevance:**

- 1-Make your contribution relevant.

##### **Maxim of Manner:**

Be perspective, and specifically:

- 1-Avoid obscurity.
- 2-Avoid ambiguity.
- 3-Be brief.
- 4-Be orderly. (Mey, 2001: 72)

#### 4.2 Metaphor

Metaphor is a rhetorical device and a manner of extraordinary use of language, that is, a matter of thought or action. It is defined by Knowles and Moon (2006: 2) as: "the use of language to refer to something other than what it was originally applied to, or what it literally means, in order to suggest some resemblance or make a connection between the two things."

With reference to our discourse, metaphor is important due to its function, explaining, clarifying, describing, evaluating, expressing and entertaining.

### 4.3 Repetition

Repetition is one of the rhetorical devices. It has been used in order to attract the audience's attention. We will explore the meaning, types and functions of metaphor in this section.

According to Cudden and Preston (1999: 742) repetition is defined as "an essential unifying element in nearly all poetry and prose. It may consist of sounds, particular syllables and words, phrases, stanzas, ideas, shapes and illusions."

## 5. Data Analysis

### Text (1)

*My husband rejects Acoli names,  
Meaningful names,  
Names that I can Pronounce  
He says:  
They are Jok names  
And he was nothing  
To do with Jok*

Ocol abdicates the traditional names of his sons and also his own name.

**Speech Act:** Declarative (reject, say)

### Grice's Maxims:

1-The Quantity Maxim:

The poet talks about one thing which is *names*. He informs the readers that he is rejecting the changing of traditional names.

2- The Quality Maxim:

The poet is confident that the traditional names are meaningful.

3-The Manner Maxim:

Here the poet violates the manner maxim as he is not brief and orderly. He prolongs his speech by using the same words.

4-The Relevance Maxim:

The poet is relevant to the subject matter due to the fact that he sticks to one topic which is *names*.

### Metaphor

Metaphor, as a rhetorical device, is used to draw the attention of the readers to a particular idea and then to persuade them. In this verse, Ocol claims that traditional names are just like jokes.

### Repetition

The poet repeats the word *names* for the sake of emphases. He also uses anaphora when he says: *They are jok names*

### Text (2)

*To express his deep wisdom.  
He says the Acholi language  
Has very few words  
It is not like the white man's language  
Which is rich and very beautiful  
A language fitted for discussing deep thoughts*

Ocol abdicates his traditional language and prefers the colonizer's one.

**Speech Acts:** Assertive (say), expressive (express)

### Grice's Maxims:

1-The Quantity Maxim:

The poet talks about one thing which is language.

2- The Quality Maxims:

He informs readers that traditional language has to be kept and never to be abdicating or given up.

3-The Manner Maxim:

The poet is clear and brief.

4- The Relevance Maxims:

The poet is relevant. Only does he talk about language, traditional language, and how it must not be substituted by a modern one.

### Metaphor

The poet compares Ocol to an unwise man for considering the traditional language of being primitive and preferring

the modern one .

### **Repetition**

The poet repeats the word *language* for emphasis . He also uses Polysyndeton : it is a term in which conjunctions are used to link a succession of words , clauses or sentences . This technique is used due to its emphasis on particular items to represent the flow and continuity ( Preminger and Borgan ,1993 : 968). He use and in "*which is rich and very beautiful* "

### **Text (3)**

»Ocol is no longer in love with;  
The old type;  
He is in love with a modern girl;  
The name of the beautiful one;  
Is Clementine;  
Brother when you see Clementine !  
The beautiful one aspires ;  
To look like a white women ;  
Her lips are red charcoal ; She resembles the wild cat ; That dipped its mouth in blood ;  
Her mouth is like raw yaws ;  
Tina dusts powder on her face ; And it looks so pale  
Ocol abdicates his wife , the African one . He prefers a white women instead .

**Speech Acts** :Directive ( indirect speech act ).

### **Grice 's Maxims :**

1-The Quantity Maxim:

The poet violates the maxim. He talks about two subjects. His ex and new wife.

2-The Quality Maxim The poet is confident that original African people are not bad. They have to be respected and admired as well.

3-The Manner Maxim:

The poet is violates the manner maxim in the sense that he is not brief.

4-The Relevance Maxim:

The poet is relevant to the subject matter due to the fact that he sticks to one topic.

### **Metaphor**

The poet uses contrast in this verse, ( old and modern ) .He considers his ex-wife to be old and primitive . He compares the new wife to the cat, wild cat. It is savage . Its mouth is impure with blood .

### **Repetition**

The poet repeats the words ( *love* , *Clementine* ) .He uses anaphora ( *she* , *her* ) . He also uses polysyndeton ( when ) . He says : *when you see* ....

### **Text (4)**

Ocol says :

*Black peoples ' food is primitive ,  
But what is backward about them ?  
He says  
Black people food is dirty :  
He means ,  
Some clumsily  
And put them  
In dirty containers*

Ocol abdicates the food of his tribe . He says it is primitive and dirty .

**Speech Acts** : Assertive ( say , mean )

### **Grice Maxims**

1-The Quantity Maxim :

The poet talks about one thing which is food .

2-The Quality Maxim:

The poet is confident enough that the traditional food is the best .

3-The Manner Maxim :

The poet is brief , clear and orderly .

4-The Relevance Maxim :

The poet is relevant . Only does he talk about traditional food .

### **Repetition**

The poet uses anaphora ( *them* , *he* ) to reinforce the meaning of words and for the sake of emphasis .

## Text (5)

*I Do Not Know the Dances of White people*

*It is true*

*I am ignorant of the dances of foreigners*

*And how they dress*

*I do not know*

*Their games*

*I cannot play ,*

*I only know the dances of our people .*

Ocol abdicates the traditional dances of his tribe .

**Speech Acts** :Assertive ( know )

**Grice's Maxim**

1-The Quantity Maxim:

The poet does not talk about only one topic .He talks about ( *the traditional dances , modern dances , games , modern dresses* ) . He violates the maxim .

2-The Quality Maxim:

The poet is certain that traditions are not bad. They should not be abdicated.

3-The Manner Maxim:

The poet is clear, and orderly.

4-The Relevance Maxim:

The poet is relevant to one topic which is *dances*.

**Repetition**

The poet repeats the same words at the beginning of adjacent phrases as anaphora device : *I don't know the dances of white people, I don't know their games* .

## 6. Conclusions

It is concluded that:

1-Speech acts of assertive , declarative , directive and expressive are used in" *Song of Lawino*" by Okot p' Bitek . WHY

2-The analysis shows that cooperative principle is really important. Bitek in all texts uses Grice's Maxims in order to keep the communication effective.

3- Metaphor and repetition are rhetorical devices used in the epic.

4- Anaphora and polysyndeton are also used and repeated . WHY HOW

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