

## Audre Lorde's Poems "A Woman Speaks" and "A Litany for Survival" towards a Gricean Theoretical Reading

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### Abstract

A number of works have been done by scholars on the study and interpretation of Audre Lorde's poems, especially through the lens of literary and critical analysis. However, Lorde's poems have not been analyzed pragmatically. A lot may have been written about Lorde's poetry, but there is absolutely no evidence of a pragmatics study of her work. Lorde is the author of many poems that have been studied in various theoretical dimensions, but none have been done with reference to their pragmatics implications. The problem which this research recognizes, therefore, is that Lorde's poems, especially the those under the present study, have not been studied and interpreted using Grice's theory of Conversational Implicature (Cooperative Principle) which comprised the four maxims: the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation. This study seeks to discover the extent to which these maxims could be applied to the reading of these selected poems of Lorde. It also seeks to ascertain the degree to which Lorde's selected poems violate or adhere to these maxims. The study has found that Audre Lorde in some of her poems, violates the maxims as well as adheres to it both in the same breath.

**Keywords:** Conversational implicature; Pragmatics; Grice; Poems; Maxims; Cooperative principles; Audre Lorde; Context

### Introduction

Experiences have shown that what people say or write is not always what they actually mean. Quite often, speakers' or authors' utterances or writings mean much more than what they actually literally say or write. For instance, a speaker who sends someone on an errand might say, "If you like, don't come back today." This statement might have the implied meaning of, "Return as soon as possible or come back very quickly." This is in line with the view of Thomas [1] who posits that "people do not always or even usually say what they mean." He illustrates this with these examples: "it's hot in here" [1]. This statement is open to varying interpretations. For someone who came into a room with the windows shut, this might mean 'please open the window.' Or it might mean, 'Is it alright if I open the window?' Or 'You're wasting electricity.' What someone says at times can be the complete opposite of what he or she means. Thomas suggests that people can mean something quite different from what their words suggest.

The preceding exposition lays out the problem of meaning in context, specifically how context contributes to meaning. Grice, writing on the same subject, studies a sort of talk-in-interaction, raising questions such as: do speakers mean what they say, or say what they mean? In other words, he studies context-dependent aspects of meaning [2,3]. We will return to Grice momentarily. Meanwhile the present study seeks to investigate the features of the speech context embedded in the poetic lines in Audre Lorde's poems, arguing that context helps determine which proposition is expressed by a given poetic line [4-6]. The meaning of those lines can be regarded as a function from a context, including time, place, and possible worlds shared by both poet and readers, into a proposition, where, as Stalnaker argues, a proposition is a function from a possible world into a truth value [7]. In other words, the study investigates aspects of meaning involved in the interaction between a poetic expression's context of utterance and the interpretation of elements within that expression. An important aspect of Audre Lorde's language use in her poetry is one that takes context into account as an essential part in the construction of meaning [4].

Returning to Grice, one of his two most influential contributions to the study of language and communication is his theory of meaning, which he began to develop in his article "Meaning," written in 1948 but published only in 1957 at the prodding of his colleague, Strawson (Wikipedia) Grice further develop his theory of meaning in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of his William James lectures on "Logic and Conversation," delivered at Harvard in 1967. These two lectures were initially published as "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions" in 1969 and "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence Meaning, and Word Meaning" in 1968, and were later collected with the other lectures as the first section of *Studies in the Way of Words* in 1989. But Grice's most groundbreaking contribution to philosophy and linguistics is his theory of implicature which started in his 1961 article, "The Causal Theory of Perception," and is most fully developed in his 1967 "Logic and Conversation." According to Grice, what a speaker means by an utterance can be divided into what the speaker "says" and what the speaker thereby "implicates." This results in what Grice calls Conversational Implicature. To conversationally implicate something, according to Grice, is to mean something that goes beyond what one says in such a way that it must be inferred from non-linguistic features of a conversational situation together with general principles of communication and cooperation. To Grice, a conversational implicature, is, therefore, something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language use. In other words, implicature provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean more than what is actually said. Grice then goes on to propound his theory of implicature which he calls the Cooperative Principle. The Cooperative Principle, according to Grice is a norm

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governing all cooperative interactions among humans and it consists of four conversational maxims.

From the foregoing, one could simply ask the question as to why the speakers' utterance can mean different things at different times on different occasions. Another question is how do we interpret what the words actually mean on a certain specific occasion? And why don't people just sadoxply what they mean? According to Thomas [1], several interesting questions arise from observations. He asserts: "If speakers regularly mean something other than what they say, how is it that people manage to understand one another if a single group of words such as "it's hot in here" could mean so many different things at different times, [in different contexts], how do we work out what it actually does mean on one occasion as opposed to the other? And why don't people just say what they mean? To him, these and many other similar issues are addressed within the area of linguistics known as pragmatics. Simply put, pragmatics is a field of study that shows how language is used to send messages that are not directly related to the additive value of the raw linguistic data of the utterance. Thomas posits that "in the early 1980s, when it became common to discuss pragmatics in general textbooks on linguistics, the most common definition of pragmatics was: meaning in use or meaning in context, in other words, contextualized meaning [1].

### Statement of the problem

Audre Lorde's writing apparently constitutes a major propelling force in the growth of postcolonial and cultural studies [5]. Several works have been done by scholars on the study and interpretation of Lorde's poems, especially through literary/critical analysis. It is quite obvious that Lorde's poems have not been subjected to a pragmatics analysis. A lot may have been done or said about Lorde's poems, but to the knowledge of this researcher, there is absolutely no evidence of the aspect of pragmatics in this regard [6]. Poems are supposed to be studied and interpreted using suitable apparatuses. Lorde's poems have rich pragmatics implications and potentialities that can be better understood when subjected to a deep contextual analysis. The problem which this research recognizes, therefore, is that Lorde's poems have not been studied and interpreted using pragmatics principles [5]. The need to solve this problem has led the researcher to embark on the study of these poems based on the theory of Conversational Implicature.

### Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to undertake a pragmatics interpretation of Lorde's poems based on the principles of conversational implicature. In specific terms, the study is designed to:

1. Examine the degree to which Audre Lorde's selected poems violate or adhere to the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation.
2. Provide possible interpretation of selected poems based on the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principles.

### Literature Review

#### Review of relevant literature in the field

A pragmatics account of literature makes it clear that in literary communication we not only have a literary text, but also the emotive effects of literary interpretation which include the needs, wishes, desires, likings and feelings of the author. Pragmatics, as we know it, is that level of linguistic analysis which studies meaning in context. Yule (as cited by Osisanwo.), asserts that pragmatics is "concerned with

the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by the listener [8,9]. When one talks about pragmatics, one is simply talking about meaning beyond the linguistic data, that is to say, that pragmatics takes care of the implied meaning of an utterance which could only be inferred within the context. The pragmatics of literary communication deals with the kinds of problems, such as the kinds of actions accomplished by the production of the literary text (i.e. the poem), the appropriate conditions of those actions, and the relationships between the actions and their contexts [10]. A text induces its interpreter to construct an image, or maybe a set of alternative images. While the image construction and image revision are going on, the interpreter also tries to figure out what the creator of the text is doing -what the nature of the communication situation is all about. For any successful interpretation, then, the reader has to draw up a set of inferences from where the contextual implication can be derived. Understanding and interpreting poetry requires understanding and appreciating of historical and social conditions and ideological factors under which the writers find themselves. Therefore, the pragmatics impact of the poem embraces the totality of the poem, combined with its emotional, intellectual and imaginative appeal [11].

Different scholars and critics of literary works have introduced important notions which either oppose or consent with the theory of pragmatics. Among these critics is Emmanuel Ngara who considers literary works as communicative utterances produced by the author and received by the reader (or hearer), especially when the poem is read aloud. He clearly maintains that a poem is not like everyday speech in that it is patterned in order to give its communicative effects a greater impact [12]. He goes further to say that the impact of a poem could be derived from the totality of the poem, from the weight of its message combined with its emotional, intellectual and imaginative appeal (p. 14-15). These views intelligibly coincide with Van Dijk's who observes that not only are the structures of literary texts important, but also their functions as well as their conditions, their production, processing and reception [10]. The fact remains that poor attention to cognitive analysis of literary communication can bring about poor insight into the emotive effects of literary interpretation which involve our needs, wishes, desires, likings and feelings.

H. P Grice was the first scholar to make a distinction between what the speaker says and what he implies [3]. The idea of "say" is closely tied to the words actually uttered and their ordinary meanings, but more so it includes all the references and predictions that result from that utterance, and whatever force, direct or indirect, it might have Martinich [13]. It is important to note that most of the poems displayed by the composers are metaphorically expressed. Metaphorical meaning is therefore not explicit in utterance. In line with this, John Searle differentiates speaker's meaning when he utters words from sentence and expression meanings [14,15]. For the poet to communicate using metaphorical, ironical, and allegorical sentiments, there must be principles according to which he is able to have more than one meaning, or something different from what he says, whereby the reader using them can understand what he or she means.

This paper is designed to comprehend the pragmatics of the poetry of Lorde [4]. The study, therefore, employs the Cooperative Principle developed by Grice whose Conversational Implicature is central to the discussion. Even though Grice's fundamental explanations deal with natural conversations, one should not neglect the fact that the general display of his approach to discourse gives room for the analysis of literary texts. The conversational strategies in literature and more so in poetry as will be discussed in this study invite an open-ended

world in which the reader acts creatively, just like the author, if both of them have to share the meaning and meet communication goals [9]. The literature review in this study is designed to accommodate the pragmatics analysis of poetry of and critical works on Audre Lorde.

In her essay entitled "A Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem 'the Road Not Taken,'" Dyah Rochmawati attempts an analysis of Robert Frost's poem, *the Road Not Taken* from the perspective of pragmatics and stylistics [16]. He asserts that a pragmatics account of literature assumes that in literary communication we do not only have a text, but also the emotive effects of literary interpretation involving needs, wishes, desires, likings and feelings of the author by using Grice's Cooperation Principle. Rochmawati's analysis does not include any pragmatics analysis of Audre Lorde's poetry, and so creates a gap that needs to be filled.

Florence Indede in her article entitled "The Pragmatics of Kiswahili Literary Political Discourse" attempt a pragmatics analysis of Kiswahili literary political discourse using Grice's Cooperative Principle [9]. She bases her analysis on the following poetic texts: *Chembe cha Moyo* by Alamin Mazrui, *Sautiya Dhiki* by Abdilatif Abdala and *Jiho la Ndani* by Said Ahmed Mohamed. She maintains that her article employs the Cooperative Principle developed by Grice whose Conversational Implicature is central to her discussion. She argues that the interpretation of meaning requires high level of application of the Cooperative Principle by both the reader and the author. Indede avers that the poetic dialogic understanding of the author's theme or message involves recognizing his rationale for using an utterance in context. Indede's analysis, as in Rochmawati's, provides a robust pragmatics analysis of selected Kiswahili political discourse poetry, but once again no reference to diaspora poetry in general nor to Audre Lorde's poetry in particular [5,11]. Hence, there is an existing lacuna that my study will address.

The reviews that follow are purely literary and critical analyses with no evidence of pragmatic reading of Lorde's poetry.

In her brilliant essay, "Living on the Line: Audre Lorde and *Our Dead Behind Us*," Gloria T. Hull avers that Lorde's seemingly essentialist definitions of herself as black/lesbian/mother/woman are not simple, fixed terms. Rather, she argues that they represent her ceaseless negotiations of a position from which she can speak [4,17]. Hull proffers examples of these ceaseless negotiations to the effect that almost as soon as she achieves a place of connection, she becomes uneasy at the comfortableness (which is, to her, a signal that something critical is being glossed over) and proceeds to rub athwart the smooth grain to find the roughness and the slant she needs to maintain her difference-defined, complexly constructed self. Secondly, Hull focuses specifically on Lorde's poetry volume *Our Dead Behind Us* which she suggests is in constant motion, with poem after poem enacting a series of displacements. Third, Hull zeroes in on the cover of *Our Dead Behind Us* which consists of "a snapshot of the last Dahomean Amazons," and "three old Black women in draped clothes," superimposed upon a sea of dark and passionate South Africans at a protest demonstration. This image, Hull contends, projects Lorde's membership in a community of struggle which stretches from ancient to modern times, speaking into exclusionary space a transcendent black woman power "released/from the prism of dreaming"...

Rachel A Dudley follows suit in her equally illuminating article ("Confronting the Concept of Intersectionality: The Legacy of Audre Lorde and Contemporary Feminist Organizations,") by asserting that Audre Lorde is one of many women to criticize second wave feminism

for overlooking issues of intersectionality [5,18]. In specific terms, she critically examines the ways in which Lorde introduced intersectionality into feminist discourse and how feminist organizations embrace this concept today. The question Dudley poses is this: have feminist organizations confronted the concept of intersectionality within their work; in other words, do they account for the multidimensionality of women's lives while fighting for economic, political and social equality; and do they see inter-sectionality as a central tenet of feminist organizing. All these questions, argues Dudley, bring us closer to an understanding of how concepts deemed important by a small group can become permanently relevant within feminism and by extension within society.

Robina Josephine Khalid in her essay ("Demilitarizing Disease: Ambivalent Warfare and Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*,") presents literary criticism for the 1980 nonfiction work *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde and offers a discussion of the power and difficulty surrounding the issue of breast cancer for women in general and Lorde in particular [12]. She describes in detail how the disease ravages the body and Lorde's physical and psychological struggle against it. Khalid focuses on Lorde's nonfiction work, *The Cancer Journals*. There is absolutely no reference to pragmatics.

Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes, a Chilean poet, activist, and lecturer (in "*Sister Outsider: An Enduring Vision: Embracing Myself, My Sister and the 'Other'*,") reflects on and reacts to Audre Lorde's critique of racism within lesbian communities [4,19]. Her purpose is to honour and rescue Lorde's wonderful insight into the power of words when uttered and shared by women, as well as her ideas about differences and connections that exist between black and white feminisms. Grounded in her own experience of alienation and racism in the European context of Women's Studies, Rivera-Fuentes then asserts that Lorde's insistence on a 'sisterhood' embraces the 'other' and ourselves at the same time.

Pracheta Bakshi (in "Audre Lorde's Exploration of Her Multiple Selves in Her Biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*") argues that Eurocentrism, or to be specific, Eurocentric feminism has always disregarded the female experience of the "Other" - be it the socio-political context or the philosophical undercurrent or the mythological projections of African [6,20]. Therefore, Bakshi asserts that Audre Lorde in her life writing has radically endeavored to explore her multiple selves, her radical female subjectivity, insisting that the African Orisha, i.e. the androgynous, ambiguous, trickster, mythological figure is re-invoked in her writings, especially in her poems and her "Biomythography." Bakshi then concludes by saying that Lorde has successfully established her Afro-centric female identity by discarding the Graeco-Roman mythological tradition as a totalizing telos [20,21].

Eric Sipinyu Njeng (in "Lesbian Poetics and Poetry of AudreLorde") makes an ontological diagnosis of lesbian experience [5,22]. Using Audre Lorde as a prime example, Njeng argues that for Lorde, lesbianism is natural, liberating, political and ultimately creative. Lesbianism is natural because, for Audre Lorde, it springs from the primal desire for the mother. Viewing heterosexuality as oppressive, lesbianism frees the woman from the inexorable strictures of patriarchy. Politically speaking, Njeng contends that even heterosexual women can and do resort to lesbian acts when they are asphyxiated with patriarchy [21,22].

The literature review gives vital insight into the pragmatics analysis of poetry and others that focus specifically on the critical interpretation of Audre Lorde's writings, especially her poetry. The literature review shows that no research has been carried out to pragmatically interpret

and analyze Audre Lorde's poetry. This observation has provided a fresh impetus for the researcher to continue the study so as to fill the existing lacuna [5].

## Methodology

In this work, pragmatics principles, specifically, Grice's Cooperative Principle which include the four Maxims, have been applied to the study of Audre Lorde's selected poems [4]. The method involves the analysis of Lorde's poems using Grice's theory of Conversational Implicature to see how the maxims could be applied to a reading of meaning in the two poems [5].

## Design of the study

The study is a pragmatics analysis of Audre Lorde's poems [6]. The design the researcher employs is analytic survey. Analytic survey or what is known as cross-sectional study involves the testing out of two hypotheses. The first is ascertaining if Lorde in these poems violates the four maxims of Grice; and the second involves whether she adheres in this poem to the four maxims of Grice. The target population or the sampling group comprises the poems, "A Woman Speaks" and "A Litany for Survival." It is involved with the collection and analysis of these poems with special reference to its pragmatic implications in relationship to the explanatory variables.

## Population for the Study

According to Nworgu, a population refers to the "limits within which the research findings are applicable." In other words, a population has to do with the elements to which the results or the outcomes of investigation are generalizable. The population for this study is, therefore, Audre Lorde's poems under this study [4].

## Sampling

Sampling is the selection of some members or elements from the population for actual investigation. This selection is necessitated by the impracticability of studying the entire population in most cases. In this work, the "A Woman Speaks and A Litany for Survival" are selected since all the poems of Lorde could not be handled in a study of this nature.

The selection is based on the fact that these poems invariably cut across the major sensitive areas of societal life such as race, politics, education, economy and religion. Purposive sampling technique is used to do the selection. Purposive sampling technique simply means the selection of specific elements for research investigations. According to Nworgu, "in purposive sampling, specific elements, which satisfy some predetermined criteria, are selected."

## Instruments for data collection

The researcher makes use of documented poems of Audre Lorde, especially those that concern race, politics, religion, education and economy. Also used are some published and unpublished materials on the activities of public and private organizations. Library materials are extensively explored for detailed information on conversational implicature and its application to text analysis. The researcher also makes use of internet for currency, modernization and global standard.

## Analysis

### "A Woman Speaks"

As a poet, one of the cardinal characteristic elements of Audre

Lorde herself is the incorporation of mythic figures such as the West African Dahomean MawuLisa into her works, especially her poetry [4]. The express purpose of that, Audre Lorde would later explain, is to challenge the cultural stereotypes that silence women of colour by denying them access to language.

In this poem, Audre Lorde opposes the assumption in patriarchy that casts women as weak, as lacking a voice and as powerless by suggesting that a new black woman has arrived, born in the image of MawuLisa to break the silences of history, to assert her right and to oppose any attempt to silence her [5]. That is why she says; "my sisters/witches in Dahomey," which represents a new black feminine self, a transcendent self to be accorded respect by the significance of her utterances. "A Woman Speaks" introduces a new woman that we have never seen before, a woman who is articulate and bold, and speaks her mind, a woman driven by an incredible energy or synergy (collective energy), a synergy that opposes men's domination and/or subordination of women. When a woman speaks, a woman destabilizes male logos; a woman rejects the traditional phallogocentric value system, a woman who rejects the false images of women embodied in phallogocentric narratives. This new woman that the poet is introducing is a woman that can stand on her own, toe to toe with men and not be cowed (suppressed).

The woman speaking in this poem is a new black woman conceived not in the Western, Graeco-Roman image of a feeble other, but in the image of African mythology. In so doing, the speaker strives for a new identity or alternate reality which affirms black female experience. This new black woman is not a weakling, but instead is imbued with vivacity (aliveness) and gravitas (somebody of substance). No matter what men give her, she remains herself and cannot be imprisoned in anybody's fantasies. This new black woman is conceived from West African mythology with resemblance to West African mythic figures. In the last three lines of the poem: "I am/woman/and not white," the speaker clinches or summarizes the basic thrust of her argument -that she is a black woman living in a predominantly white society but affirming her black heritage [21-23].

In the first stanza lines two through four, the speaker says, "my magic is unwritten/but when the sea turns back/it will leave my shape behind." This is in reference to how women have left a mark on the world even when the world has turned its back on them. In seeking the attention of the world, the speaker suggests that women seek no special favour nor pity but simply a level-playing field to actualize their dreams. In the ambience (realm) of level playing field, there are no stereotypes or negatives, just an opportunity to be viewed as equals. In this level-playing field, the ideology that men are the supreme beings is overthrown and cast aside where men and women engage in a healthy competition without let, hindrance or prejudice. The poem ends on an optimistic note despite the horrors of history, the horrors of the middle passage [24,25].

The idea of incorporating non-Western creatrix figures such as the West African MawuLisa and SebouLisa is to challenge the cultural stereotypes that silence women of colour [26]. What Audre Lorde does in this poem is to remythologize her work, and in so doing, introduces a new powerful tool for self-discovery, political resistance, and social change. According to her, change will rise endemically from the experience fully lived and responded to, or as the African-American Rhythm & Blues singer Sam Cooke croons "Change is Gonna Come."

**Grice's maxims of quantity and quality in Audre Lorde's "A Woman Speaks":** The poem, "A Woman Speaks" introduces a new

woman, a new woman who opposes the traditional Western and even African conceptualization of women as weak and eternally dependent on men. As such, the images Lorde uses to describe this new woman are often non-conventional and sometimes outrageous. The woman in this poem is a warrior woman, not the typical woman associated with fragility. For instance, we read:

*"I have been woman for a long time beware my smile*

*I am treacherous with old magic and the noon's new fury with all your wide futures promised*

*I am woman and not white."*

So in offering this new woman to the world, the speaker provides adequate information about her being, making sure that the reader understands all the dimensions of her personality. At times, the speaker seems to exaggerate this woman personality which may give the impression that too much information has been given, but on closer examination, the information is not redundant given the newness and extraordinariness of this new woman personality [27]. What is new is the shocking revelation of a personality that individuals, society and culture have not seen, but the truth is that as the speaker tells us, she has existed since antiquity, or as the poet says in stanza two, "ageless." So the hyperbole is not intended to offer too much information but instead to offer a new kind of information compatible with her extraordinary, other-worldly personality. To that extent, the speaker adheres to the first proviso of the Gricean Maxim of Quantity. The description of this new woman also adheres to the second proviso of the Maxim of Quantity. The association of this new woman with the moon, the sun, in fact the whole planetary system, her linkage with mythology, her identification with "witches in Dahomey," all of that represents the strongest possible statement about this incredible new woman, or as Maya Angelou would describe her, a phenomenal woman.

With regard to the Gricean Maxim of Quality, from the standpoint of a new phenomenon, there is nothing apparently false about the statement and/or description of the new woman. However, from the standpoint of cultural tradition, the statement strikes us as blatantly false and, therefore, unbelievable. The speaker uses clusters of striking metaphors in this poem to convey her meaning. For Grice, metaphor involves implicature and disimplicature both trading on explicature, which is the only thing communicated. The utterer is engaged in word play for her own amusement. Grice maintains that metaphor is not to be expressed in anything other than its own tenor [28]. A metaphor, for Grice, does not merely involve falsity, but is also morally illegal. For people accustomed to seeing women as fragile, weak, dependent, and as objectified entities, the shock of meeting this new woman would register the impression that the speaker is lying, but in reality, it is those people who are still steeped in the past that refuse to acknowledge the truth about this new woman. The truth of the matter is that the speaker has called it the way it is, has spoken the truth regarding the emergence of this new phenomenal woman. And so the speaker adheres to the first proviso of the Gricean Maxim of Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false [29].

The description of this new woman also adheres to the second proviso of the Gricean Maxim of Quality: Do not say that for which you lack evidence. The speaker is the only one privileged "to look into the entrails of Uranus/where the restless oceans pound," the only one privileged to mingle with the "witches in Dahomey," and there espies the vision of the new woman in all her nobility and grandeur and ferocity, and so has evidence for what she is narrating about the new woman. In other words, she is speaking from experience, while those of

us on the outside, those of us who have not peered into the entrails of the Uranus, those of us who look at women from the eyes of tradition, do not have the privilege of knowing the truth of this new woman.

**Grice's maxims of relation and manner in "A Woman Speaks":** The Maxim of Relation underscores the need for relevance and for staying on the topic.

It presupposes that conversational speakers avoid any impression of the introduction of topics that are not germane to the issue at stake, and that the speakers avoid unnecessary digressions that do not contribute to the bone of contention. In the first stanza, the longest of three stanzas, the speaker introduces this new woman who now voices her opinion about herself and about her ethnicity, that is, her blackness. She begins:

*"Moon marked and touched by sun my magic is unwritten"*

"Moon marked and touched by sun," suggests an eclipse; the effect of this eclipse is black, further suggesting her blackness and the fact that the significance of that blackness remains unacknowledged. The poet in this poem seeks to acknowledge that significance, further underscoring one of the central themes in African American literature the Struggle for Significance. The poet, therefore, introduces this new black woman who has the capacity to speak, who has the capacity to break through the throes of silence. Whereas the old black woman is pigeonholed in silence, the new woman has finally found her voice and she is ready to tell her story without hindrance and without intimidation. So far, no evidence of irrelevance occurs in this conversation. Everything the speaker has said so far is true and relevant to the circumstances of the black woman in America, a woman who is emerging from the shadows and margins of silence to the limelight of vocality. Another evidence of relevance in the poem occurs in the last three lines: "I am/woman/and not white." Here, the speaker finally acknowledges what we have always suspected that she is a woman and a black woman at that. The only suspicion of irrelevance occurs in lines fourteen and fifteen of the first stanza where we read: "look into the entrails of Uranus/where the restless oceans pound." On the surface, the reference to Uranus appears to have no significant relation to the new black woman or to blackness. What it means then is that the two lines are the only lines in the entire poem that tend to violate the Maxim of Relation.

While in "A Woman Speaks," there seems to be clarity and brevity of expression, especially in lines such as, "I seek no favor/untouched by blood" (stanza one, lines 5 and 6), "I did not dwell/within my birth nor my divinities" (stanza two, lines 1 and 2), and "I have been woman/for a long time..." (stanza three, lines 1 and 2)/"I am/woman/and not white" (stanza three, lines 8 to 10), there is also an equal amount of obscure expressions, even unnecessary prolixity, in the poem's narrative such as, "Moon marked and touched by sun" (stanza one, line one), "look into the Uranus/where the restless oceans pound" (stanza one, lines 14 and 15), "witches in Dahomey/wear me inside their coiled cloths" (stanza two, lines 6 and 7), and finally, "I am treacherous with old magic/and the noon's new fury." These expressions create an ambiguity that impedes the reader's understanding and therefore violates Grice's Maxim of Manner.

Additionally, although, Lorde's poetry is said to be simple and straightforward, the insertion of these prolix expressions coupled with appeals to West African mythology (Dahomean mythology), at the very least complicates the reader's understanding of the basic storyline. As a result, the two central provisos or elements of the Maxim of Manner appear to have been violated. What this shows is that "A Woman

Speaks," in terms of Gricean Maxim both violate and adhere to the Maxim of Manner, making basic understanding of the internal logic of the poem somewhat of an uphill task.

### "A Litany for Survival"

In "A Litany for Survival," as in many of her other works, Lorde is concerned with the politics of ethnic, gender, and sexual marginalization. Knowing the devastating effect of being devalued and discarded, Lorde asks bold questions about who is chosen for such treatment and why.

As an African American, feminist, and lesbian thinker, Lorde often experienced life from the position of marginality and imposed silence. The poem reads like a collective prayer and recitation of petitioners meant to understand the elaborate scheme perpetrated by the powerful. The petitioners themselves recognize and echo the leader's belief that they "were never meant to survive" (last stanza). Through their collective ceremonial recitation, they are emerging from their silence, speaking their new understanding, dispelling the deception that has silenced them for so long, and restoring and empowering themselves. The last three lines make this perfectly clear:

*"So it is better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive"*

The speaker enjoins all of us to be bold in our resolve to speak up even in our moment of difference, not to be afraid in our moment of challenge. For in that resolve, we achieve a transcendence that surpasses our enemies and our enemy's designs against us. In short, in that transcendence lies our ultimate triumph and edification. The speaker argues that fear should not be an impediment for people seeking to achieve their dreams, for when fear paralyzes them, [their] "words will not be heard/nor welcomed."

In another sense, "A Litany for Survival" is a poem in free verse containing three dense stanzas and a concluding coda of three lines. It is a type of communal prayer involving alternating speakers, usually a leader and a congregation of petitioners. The scene of the poem's title is enacted by its form: the lead speaker begins the prayer, directly addressing the other petitioners yet speaking as if he is also one of the petitioners. The first two stanzas could be delivered by the leader's solitary voice, as both stanzas give prolonged descriptions of the petitioners' needs and circumstances. The petitioners' multiple voices then deliver the third stanza, which proceeds in parallel phrases with succinct repetition similar to the rhythmic verses that a congregation would chant in unison. The leader's and petitioners' voices blend together in the concluding stanza in which a resolution is given for the grave situation that has prompted the ceremony. As in most ceremonies in which prayer is offered, the petitioners recognize their own insignificance and their defenselessness in relation to temporal powers greater than themselves. They know that those with greater power desire to terrorize them into deathly silence - a silence that will erase their memories and extinguish their children's dreams for the future. But they are determined not to let them. Although the petitioners face their own apparent obliteration, their prayer does not, as prayers normally do, request divine intervention. They see no need to call on God, given their identity as lesbian sisters. Engaging in the communal ceremony represented by the poem is itself a means of resisting the will of the powerful. The act of self-expression and the communal sharing of their own desires, all of which are embedded in their meditation, enable the petitioner to resist those who desire their defeat.

In a way, the sheer vocality of the poem derives from the African

oral and literary traditions. Audre Lorde lures the reader into a ceremony that promises to be a common prayer. After joining the ceremony, however, the readers find themselves in unfamiliar supernatural territory where the power being summoned is not the distant, omnipotent Father of the Christian faith. The readers discover and the petitioners remember that the power being summoned lies within themselves in their own communal voice.

**Grice's Maxim of quantity and quality in Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival":** "A Litany for Survival" as noted earlier is a short poem and as such communicates its idea succinctly and matter-of-factly. Given the succinctness of its rhetoric, it seems unlikely that words are wasted. The poem's vocabulary doesn't suffer from unnecessary prolixity, even obscurity. In view of this noted fact, the speaker gives adequate information to help the reader understand the elements of her predicament. There is no attempt by her to saturate the reader with overbearing information beyond what the reader needs to understand where the poet-speaker is coming from. In a similar vein, no attempt is made by the poet-speaker to withhold critical information regarding her life's story. Therefore, the speaker's narrative adheres perfectly to the first proviso of the Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as required (Don't say too much or too little). Similarly, the narrative adheres strictly to the second proviso: Make the strongest statement. The emotional complexity of the speaker's narrative suggests or represents the strongest statement she could make about her circumstances.

The speaker's narrative has a ring of veracity and authenticity in that she is the one telling her life's story. She and she alone comprehends the fragments of that story better than anyone else. So when she talks, we have our ears glued to her story. So it seems highly unlikely that anything is manufactured or concocted, and so there is no falsity in her story. In a similar vein, everything she tells us has been an intricate part of her life story, and because of that, there is preponderant evidence including plausibility behind her story. So in neither of the provisos does any violation occur.

**Grice's Maxim of relation and manner in Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival":** The poem dwells on those people who live on the periphery of existence, those who live on the margins, who by telling their own story move from the margins to the center, thereby acquiring significance or gravitas. The whole thrust of the poem is about moving from insignificance to significance. It is only those people who are guided by boldness or fearlessness that can make such a journey from relative insignificance to significance. Only those people who are not "imprinted with fear" will achieve that triumph, the triumph of gravitas. That is what the whole poem is about. So, there is absolutely no irrelevancy; the speaker adheres to the Gricean Maxim of Relation. In terms of the Maxim of Manner, because of the single mindedness of the speaker's account of those who live at the edges and interstices of life, there is no obscurity of expression, no ambiguity, no prolixity, no mincing of words, no obfuscations. The whole narrative comes down like pure water, as crystal clear as ever.

### Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to read Audre Lorde's selected poem as conversations between speaker and listener in terms of the speaker's intent beyond the literal level of meaning, in other words, the implied or pragmatics meaning of what the speaker says and the extent to which the listener understands the context of meaning. What the researcher is saying is that to understand Audre Lorde in her poetry, especially in the poem selected, one must go beyond the semantic or

literal meaning of words, concentrating instead on the contextual level of meaning, in other words, the inference that listener and the reader construct. In Lorde's poetry, especially the one under the present study. The researcher has incorporated conversational implicature of Grice by adopting the Cooperative Principle, specifically the four Maxims which underpin the general rules we follow in conversation.

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