

## Pragmatism in Police Stations: An Evaluation of the Violation of Grice's Maxims in Suspects' Interrogations

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### ABSTRACT

*During police interrogations, accused persons flout or violate conversational maxims to seek a soft landing or escape the law's wrath. Hence, this study evaluates the frequency at which Grice's Maxims were violated during suspects' interrogations. The study identifies these violations based on four maxims: quality, quantity, manner, and relation/relevance results of this study indicate that accused individuals often violate the maxim of quantity to create distractions and divert attention from incriminating evidence during police investigations. The results also show that accused persons violate the maxim of manner by making obscured statements to reduce tension during interrogations. This paper concludes that in suspects' interrogations, accused persons use flouting or violation of Grice's Maxims as communicative tools to escape the punishment(s) apportioned for crime(s) that they commit directly or indirectly.*

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### KEYWORDS

Grice's maxims; Interrogation; Police station; Pragmatics; Suspects.

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### 1. Introduction

The role of language in human communication is immeasurable, as it serves as a fundamental tool for connection and expression. According to Ogolekwu and Ekpang (2023), language is a natural inheritance of human beings, enabling them to communicate, share information, and engage in social pleasantries (p.161). It functions as a bridge for individuals to convey their thoughts, emotions, and ideas, fostering understanding and cooperation within societies. Moreover, language is a skillful human invention that extends beyond communication to include identification and cultural representation (Yaumi et al., 2024; Dalyan et al., 2022; Pertiwi et al., 2024). It reflects the uniqueness of its inventors, serving as a means of showcasing cultural values and traditions. Through language, humans not only build relationships but also preserve and transmit their cultural heritage, emphasizing its significance as both a practical and symbolic tool in human interaction.

Language is one of the apparatuses used to extract useful information from police officers. Therefore, during criminal investigations, they resort to crafty linguistic usage during suspects' interrogations to access incriminating elements from their speeches or utterances. This linguistic usage is a tool deployed to evaluate the suspect's responses and utterances concerning the questions put forward to him/her (Amelia J, et al., 2024; Awaru et al., 2024; Junaid et al., 2024). The reactions or the outcome of this interrogation is relevant to the police investigator because he/she believes that what the accused person says will be used against him/her before a court of law in line with the allegation(s). Thus, this paper evaluates the suspects' utterances based on Grice's Maxims which include: quality, quantity, manner, and relation/relevance.

#### 1.1 Pragmatics: A survey

Pragmatics is derived from the Greek Word "Pragma" meaning action from the words "practice" and practical. Huang (2007, p. 2) views that pragmatics as a modern branch of linguistic inquiry has its origin in the philosophy of language. To Huang, the philosophies contained in the study of pragmatics can be traced to the work of the philosophers Charles Morris, Rudolf Carnap, and Charles Peirce in the 1930s. In his contribution, Huang (2007) buttresses that "the central ideas underlying the former (pragmatics) were originated by the philosophers Gottlob Frege, Alfred Tarski and Bertrand Russell" (p.2). Thus, there was a partial application of pragmatic theory and methodology to natural language in

the 1950s and 1960s by followers of the school such as Richard Montague, David Donaldson, and David Lewis led to the development of today's formal semantics. Later, other philosophers like J. L. Austin brought the school of ordinary language philosophers to the limelight at Oxford in the 1950s and 1960s.

In line with this background, Horn and Ward (2004) point out that: "More recently, work in pragmatic theory has extended from the attempt to rescue syntax and semantics from their unnecessary complexities to other domains of linguistics inquiry, ranging from historical linguistics to the lexicon, from language acquisition to computational linguistics, from intonation structure to cognitive science (p. xi)

Based on the accounts of these pragmatic ancestries, it can be said that the birth of pragmatics in the field of linguistics was prompted out of necessity. It is an accidental discharge of an utterance to refer to pragmatics as a procreation of semantics.

One of the pioneering fathers of pragmatics, Morris (1971, p. 6) defines pragmatics as the study of the relation of signs to interpreter. According to Yule (1996, p. 1), pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). Yule's definition has four targets which are: the meaning, communication, speaker (writer), and listener (reader). To Mey (2001, p. 194), it is the science of the unsaid. The word "unsaid" by Mey could be determined by the linguistic behavior of the interlocutor(s). Fetzer (2004) views that: Pragmatics is fundamentally concerned with communicative action and its felicity in context, investigating action concerning the questions of what action is, what may count as an action, what action is composed of what conditions need to be satisfied for action to be felicitous, and how the action is related to the context (p.23)

Fetzer further states that pragmatics is frequently conceptualized as the science of language use, the study of context-dependent meaning, and the study of speaker-intended meaning. In pragmatics, for an action to be felicitous, it must meet certain conditions (like relevance, clarity, or appropriateness) for the intended communication to be effective and meaningful within that specific context. Jarmila and Jirka (2011, p. 1) affirm Fetzer's views on pragmatics that it is the study of how language is used and the effect of context on language. The issue of context becomes a recurrent phenomenon in the definition of pragmatics because no utterance exists in a vacuum; it is situated upon certain contexts such as who speaks, what are they saying, where are they speaking, and the time such speech is made.

However, this study adopts the definitions of pragmatics made by Yule (1996, p. 1), Fetzer (2004, p. 23), and Mey (2001) due to the key elements that fortify the study of pragmatics such as language use, communication, meaning, participants (interlocutors), speech (utterance) or the topic that makes up the context of situation and behaviors.

## **1.2 Speech Acts in Pragmatics**

According to Senft (2014), the modern study of a speech act" is connected intrinsically with J. L. Austin's groundbreaking for James William's lectures delivered at Harvard in 1955 where he lectured on a topic. "How to do things with words"

In his work, Sadock, observes that the widely stated sentences are: 1) "I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin", 2) "I now pronounce you man and wife". The above sentences indicate two areas of consideration emerged. First, "christen" and "pronounce". These words are performatives or actions carried out by a person bestowed with power or authority. These ideas were serendipitous to John Searle's student who reviewed the study locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. According to Austin, the three distinct performative acts are the locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act.

## **1.3 Review of the Maxims in Police Interrogations**

A police investigation is a structured process carried out by law enforcement to uncover the facts of a crime, identify those involved, and gather evidence for court. The Gricean principle is particularly relevant during police interviews, where controlling information can significantly impact the investigation's outcome (Benneworth, 2020). Grice's conversational maxims which include Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner serve as a framework for effective communication. However, their application in police reports, a crucial part of legal discourse, often reveals complexities in adherence or violations of these maxims. **a) The Maxim of Quantity:** This requires speakers to provide an appropriate amount of information. Gibbons (2019) explores how this maxim is used in police interviews to influence suspects' responses, with officers manipulating the amount of information to elicit detailed responses, reveal inconsistencies, or prompt confessions. This highlights the powerful role of linguistic strategies in interrogations. **b) Maxim of Quality:** This focuses on truthfulness—is also crucial. In police reporting, adhering to the Maxim of Quality is essential to avoid misrepresentations, which can

have serious legal consequences. **c) Maxim of Relation:** This pertains to the relevance of the information being shared in a conversation (Grice, 1989). Henderson and Patel (2021) discuss how officers sometimes include details that, while not directly relevant to the incident, are included to anticipate future questions or challenges in court. This practice, while well-intentioned, can dilute the report's focus. **d) Maxim of Manner:** This states the need for clear, unambiguous, and orderly communication. Richards and Ford (2019) observe that while police use specialized language for precision, it can sometimes obscure meaning for those unfamiliar with the terminology, like jurors or the public, potentially leading to misunderstandings in legal settings where clarity is crucial.

#### 1.4 Nigeria Police Station as a Speech Community

Budiarsa (2015, p. 380) defines a speech community as a community where the language is used as a means of communication can be a small town, village, or even a club or as large as nation or a group of nations. A speech community refers to a group of speakers whose shared experiences and behavioral patterns are expressed through their use of language. A speech community may consist of small a group bound together by face-to-face interaction like the Nigeria Police Force (Udoh 2010, p. 23). This shows that the speech community is not determined by a specific range of people in society but by the linguistic bond that unites them. Aboh and Uduk (2017, p. 48), explain that speech community is a socio-anthropological term for a group of people who use the same variety of language and who share specific rules for speaking and interpreting speech. The Nigeria Police Force has communicative linguistic networks that aid their official and unofficial interactions. In this regard, Ogolekwu (2018, p. 38) proposes that this speech community can be referred to as a Network of Police Linguistic/Speech Community.

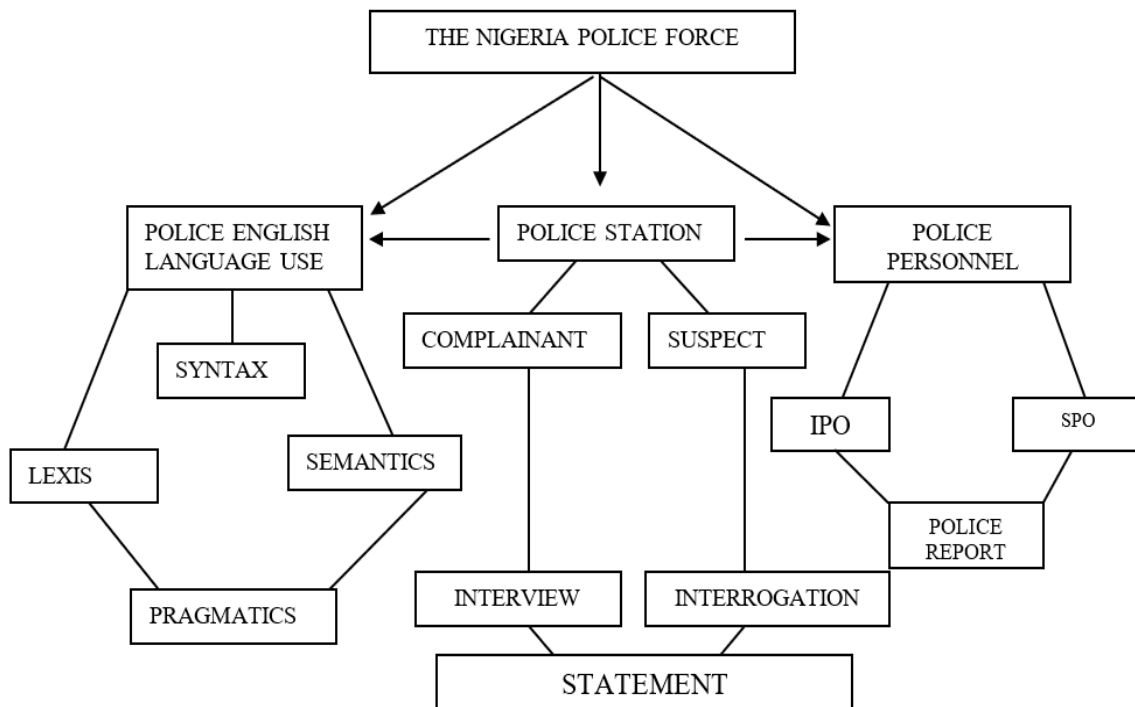


Figure 1. Network of Police Linguistic/Speech Community

#### 1.5 Network of Police Linguistic/Speech Community Proposed By Ogolekwu (2018, p. 38)

The above diagram is structured with three main branches which are: police language use, police station, and police personnel. First, police language is divided into lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features. The second branch is the police station, which includes complainants who report cases against suspects. Both complainants and suspects give statements as indicated below. Meanwhile, the statements of the complainant are written voluntarily through an interview while the statement of the suspect is written under words of caution through interrogation. The third branch in the diagram is police personnel which is divided into Investigating Police Officers (IPO) and the Senior Police Officers. The IPO investigates a case and writes an interim report. This network of language and interlocutors identifies the police community as unique. The language used within the community is professional at one end and non-professional at the other end (Ogolekwu 2018, p. 39). This means there are variables in the choice of linguistic items.

## 1.6 Suspects' Interrogation: A Linguistic Approach

The pragmatism in suspects' interrogation is influenced by the choice of language adopted by the police investigators which is only intelligible to them can make or mar the investigation. Language plays a vital role in police stations especially when accused persons are being interrogated. Ogolekwu (2022) views language as cutting-edge in all human activities. Before an accused is interrogated, the officer investigating the crime would first ask him/him (the accused person) the preferred language to be used, or an interpreter is alternatively used.

Interrogation means to question somebody closely and aggressively for a long time (Police Manual, 2003, p. 90). Police interrogate persons accused of having been involved in various crimes to establish the authorship of such crimes as suspected. During this interrogation, the police investigator is not expected to torture the suspect, lure him/her, entice him/her, or give him/her hope which he (the investigator) believes will not be accomplished or engage in excruciating arguments with the suspect in question. The Police Manual which guides the activities of the police officers states that "the officer conducting the interrogation should be capable of generating ideas by putting across leading questions". All information supplied must be critically analyzed to ensure that all alibi is proven beyond reasonable doubt.

Kassin, Richman, Meisner and Leach (2007) view that: Interrogation sometimes includes offering the suspect sympathy, moral justification and excuses; interrupting the suspect's denial and objections; implying and/or pretending to have independent evidence of guilt; minimizing moral seriousness of the offence and appealing to the suspect's religion or personal conscience (p. 390)

Ajayi (2014, p. 43) views that "interrogation is no longer in the parlance of the Nigeria Police, as a group of human rights activist had earlier fought against the use of the word in Police- suspect interaction". Besides, Udoh (2015), studies the English language of the Nigeria police. Udoh's work evaluates police proficiency in English language usage and how it is being domesticated as a speech community. Udoh's study posits that there exist certain linguistic terms and expressions within the Police force that are only intelligible to the members organization. Anumudu and Abaya (2019) investigate the language use of the police in the interrogation of suspects. According to them "the police employ strategic discursive devices such as formalism, interruption, topic control, tense, vocabulary choice, pronouns, modality and various strands of question and answers forms that are valued-laden to reproduce, negotiate and maintain power, dominance and inequality during the interrogation of suspects" (p. 1). The linguistic approaches adopted by the police investigator during interrogation sometimes have portraits of leniency and controversialities as the officer consciously uses such to extract useful information regarding the crime committed.

## 2. Methodology

This research is quantitative. Hence, it involves data computation by using figures and tables. The data for this paper were transmitted audio clips of the Investigating Police Officer (IPO) interrogating three suspects involving the offenses of stealing, rape, and murder. The data were drawn from three police stations in Calabar Metropolis: Akim Police Divisional Headquarters, Atakpa Divisional Headquarters, and State Housing Divisional Headquarters. The data were easily accessible and obtained by the help of resource persons who were serving police officers in the above stations. However, the researcher evaluates the data on the pedigree of Grice's Maxims through these steps.

- A. Transcription of the interrogations into written texts
- B. Tabular presentation of the extract from the texts
- C. Classification of the Grice's Maxims.
- D. Tabular classification and evaluation using a percentage as shown below:

$$P = \frac{F}{T} \times 100\%$$

Where

P = Percentage

N = Frequency (Number of Grice's Maxims occurrence during the interrogations).

T = Total number of Grice's Maxims in the text.

E: The statistic evaluation of the Grice's Maxims in the texts.

- Q = The overall percentage from each maxim  
C = Cumulative total of the Grice's Maxims used thus:

### 3. Result and Discussions

#### a. Extract 1

Table 1. Extract 1

S/No	Quality	Quantity	Manner	Relation/ Relevance
1		Accused: I dey live for White House. I'm the junior brother of PDP Ward Chairman, Mr Ene Akpan. (DATUM 1, line 6)	Accused: Ete, this Ene who brought this case is like my junior brother. (DATUM 1, line 16)	Accused: Officer, as I tell you. It is not my mind to do that. This country hard. I no get food again. (DATUM 1, line 12)
2		Accused. Yes, I know him. Na my neighbour. We dey do something together. (DATUM 1, line 10)	Accused: Silent! Yes but na hardship cause. Not from my mind because we are from the same family member. (DATUM 1, line 26)	Accused: Ete, this Ene who bring this case is like my junior brother. (DATUM 1, line 16)
3		Accused: No. No be say I mean to carry it from my mind but I don't know what push me (DATUM 1, line 20)	Accused: Na Keke him the drive (DATUM 1, line 36)	Accused: Ete (Father), na devil o. I never do that before. Even my wife can tell you that. I used to go Mount Zion Church. (DATUM 1, line 18)
4		Accused: Silent! Yes but na hardship cause. Not from my mind because we are from the same family member. (DATUM 1, line 26)		Accused: Silent... Officer leave this case. We go settle ourself. (DATUM 1, line 30)
5				Accused: Na Keke him the drive (DATUM 1, line 36)
6				Accused: Silent... Officer I never eat today ooo (DATUM 1, 42)
<b>Total</b>	0	4	3	6

Table 2. Frequency 1

Maxims	Frequency	Percentage
Quality	0	0
Quantity	4	30.8
Manner	3	23.1
Relation/Relevance	6	46.2

<b>Total</b>	13	100%
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Tables 1 and 2 above show the frequency at which the suspect involved in the crime violated Grice's maxims. Based on the percentage in Table 1.1, it is indicated that the violation of the Maxim of Relevance/Relation takes the highest figure of 6 to 46.2% followed by the Maxim of Quantity which has 4 to 30.8%. Meanwhile, 3 of 23.1% is allocated for the Maxim of Manner and that of Quality has zero percentage as displayed in the above tables.

b. Extract 2

**Table 3. Extract 2**

S/No	Quality	Quantity	Manner	Relation/Relevance
1		Accused: I'm a bricklayer. I dey do House agent also. If you need a house now. Officer I can connect you. (EXTRACT 2, line 6)	Accused: Silent! Him call me say he get a deal for me ( My friend said he had a deal for me) (DATUM 2, line 14)	Accused: Officer I have one thing to say My mother no well and na me dey take care of her. (DATUM 2, line 32)
2		Accused: Yes but my wife no dey again. She comot go here papa House (My wife left me) (EXTRACT 2, line 10)	Accused: Officer, I no dey enter people house to steal but my friend AK Domy say we should g. As we break the window, they catch us. We no steal anything. (DATUM 2, line 18)	Accused: Silent!!! Not like that. I be orphan and people dey under me (DATUM 2, line 34)
3		Accused: His name is Dominic (people call him AK Domy). His his near Etagbor, Enugu Motor Park (DATUM 2, line 16)		
4		Accused: Me, AK Domy, and one guy like the call him Blacky. The guy no be Nigeria. The parents are from Ghana but there are not here again (DATUM 2, line 22)		
5		Accused: No, ask AK Domy. But I dey see him for motor park. They say him get girl friend there also. (DATUM 2, line 30)		
6		Accused: Yes, we no carry anything. Abasi mbo. Wetin		

		bring me to this world (DATUM 2, line 36)		
<b>Total</b>	0	6	2	2

**Table 4. Frequency 2**

<b>Maxims</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Quality	0	0
Quantity	6	60
Manner	2	20
Relation/Relevance	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>

Also, both tables above, the frequency at which the suspect violated Grice's Maxims during interrogation is consciously determined. Percentage allotted for the Maxim of Quantity is the highest with 60%. This is because the accused violated the maxim in a bid to defend self. However, maxims of manner and relation/relevance share 20% each with no percentage allotted for the Maxim of Quality.

c. Extract 3

**Table 5. Extract 3**

<b>S/No</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Manner</b>	<b>Relation / Relevance</b>
1		Accused: Yes. I'm a final year student. Also a medical student. (DATUM 3, line 6)		Accused: Not like that Sir. Pls., I have my CA Test tomorrow and I have not read my book yet. This case is distracting me. (DATUM 3, line 16)
2		Accused: She caused it. (DATUM 3, line 10)		Accused: Silent... Stupid UNICAL brought me here to suffer (DATUM 3, line 24)
3		Accused: Silent! Officer na she talk that one oo. Wetin concerned me. But she must learn the lesson of her life.( DATUM 3, line 14)		Accused: Oh my goodness. I have not read for my Test. (DATUM 3, line 28)
4		Accused: Silent! Officer I'm a student (DATUM 3, line 18)		
<b>Total</b>	0	4	0	3

**Table 6. Frequency 3**

<b>Maxims</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Quality	0	0
Quantity	4	57.1
Manner	0	0
Relevance/Relation	3	42.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figures in tables above show the frequency at which the suspect failed to observe the Grice's Maxims when responding to the investigating Police Officer's (IPO's) questions. This scenario is not different from the experiences in Table 1 above where maximum instances of the violation of the maxim of quantity are prevalent. Here, the violation of the maxim of quantity occurs four times at 57.1% and three times occurrences to 42.9% of the maxim of Relevance/Relation with zero violation of both the maxim of quality and manner.

Below is the cumulative figure resultants from the entire data. In this case, tables are computed together to give the overall violation of the maxima and the most violated one by suspects during police interrogations.

d. Extract 4

**Table 7. Extract 4**

Maxims	Extract 1	Extract 2	Extract 3	Total	Percentage
Quality	0	0	0	0	0
Quantity	4	6	4	14	46.7
Manner	3	2	0	5	16.7
Relation/ Relevance	6	2	3	11	36.7
Cumulative	13	10	7	30	100%

The results above have proven that suspects violate maxim of quantity than the rest three. The statistics presented in table with the highest frequency or range of 46.7% is an indicator that during interrogations, accused person consciously or unconsciously commit or fail to observe maxim of quantity because he (the accused) devices certain communicative flaws by adding needless details to either bargain their innocence in the alleged crime or to maneuver their escape route from the allegation. It is also observed that the suspects violated the maxim of relations/relevance with 36.7% indicator which places much emphasis on the relevance of utterances used to relate with the topic of discourse. The essence is to divert or distract the attention of the Police investigator from the focal points. Meanwhile, there was sequence of obscured and inordinate utterances used by the accused which evidently show the violation of the maxim of manner. The percentage indicator of this violation show 16.7%.

These results have shown that during interrogations, accused persons magically, consciously or unconsciously provide unnecessary information in cases their directly involved to seek for me scape route and to distract the Investigating Police Officers (IPOs) from the focal or incriminating areas. In a bid to escape lawful punishment, accused persons give details which are not required or make statements which are not relevant to the topic of discourse.

## 5. Conclusion

Intelligent Criminals are fond of creating or maneuvering statements to cover their crime(a) or reduce punishment apportioned for the crime which they commit directly or indirectly. In the case of felonies such as murder, rape, armed robbery, etc, suspects involved, having understood the consequences of such crimes will intensify efforts to paddle or frustrate the investigation by being skillful in their statements to avert the wrath of the law which is evident the current study. Therefore, this study concludes that in suspects' interrogations, flouting or violation of Grice's Maxims are used as communicative tools by accused persons to escape the punishment(s) apportioned for crime(s) that they commit directly or indirectly.

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