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Gombe Savannah Journal of Language, Literature and Communication Studies (GOSAJOLLCOS) is a peer-reviewed journal of the Department of English, Gombe State University. The journal is committed to the development of communication arts through researches in Language, Linguistics, Literature, Theatre Arts, Cultural Studies, Creative Arts, Media and Communication Studies. It has both print and online versions. The Editorial board hereby calls for thoroughly researched papers and articles on the subject areas already mentioned. Submissions of papers are accepted all year round but publication is expected to be done in May/June annually. All manuscripts should be accompanied with the sum of ten thousand (10,000) naira only. On acceptance of any manuscript, contributors will pay the sum of twenty five thousand (25,000) naira only as publication fee.

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## IMPLICATURE IN VIEWERS' COMMENTS: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF AFCON 2024 ONLINE VIEWERS' RESPONSES

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### Abstract

*This study discusses the knowledge and utilization of language in online comments of football viewers using a pragmatic theory. The research anchors on the recently concluded African Cup of Nation (AFCON 2024). It brings about different expressions used by online football viewers and communication with the aim of explicating some of the realisable implicatures. Invariably, it explains viewers' observance of Grice's maxims and as well as the various manners they are flouted and/or violated. The study specifically explores the language use in the context of football viewers that investigates the observance of cooperative principle (CP) by online language users if stylistically differ from the conventional use; and to examine the level of violation of the conversation rules in online language. A purposeful sampling method was used on a number of excerpts and their comments. The data were largely collected online from a popular Facebook page called AFCON UPDATES 2024, which has over 800,000 followers. A purposeful sampling was adopted to select the most relevant data to the study. Based on the research findings, there is a preponderant violation of the cooperative principles (CP) in a number of instances, in a unique manner typical of the football viewers' context.*

**Keywords:** Pragmatic theory, football viewers, Cooperative principle, Conversational implicature

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### Introduction

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that concerns with the use of language. In pragmatics, a word may mean different things and people react to them differently depending on their contexts of view. However, according to (Morris, 1938, p.6), Pragmatics is "the study of the relation of signs to interpreters". Stalnaker understands Pragmatics as "the study of linguistic acts at the context in which they are performed" (Stalnaker, 1972, p.383). A prominent and early approach to Pragmatics focuses on conversational implicature, which is a theory founded by Paul Grice; whereby the speaker implies and the listener infers. It looks beyond the literal meaning of an utterance and considers how meaning is constructed as well as focusing on the implied meaning.

It is often believed in general terms that pragmatics cannot be separated from communication in sharing of information and

thoughts. Reason, while pragmatics directs you to the way words are being used, communication concerns with how message receiver understands the signs and actions targeted at them by the communicator. Jenny Thomas consented to this when he viewed pragmatics as "the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance, and the meaning potential of an utterance" (Thomas, 1995: p22).

It is a general assumption that humans have different ways and mediums through which they communicate. It could be one on one, telegram, phone talk, print media, radio, and the most influencing one of the present time, social media. Social media gives a good platform to reach out and influence larger number of people even though its application is still evolving. The growth of social media has brought about so many avenues for discussion, which includes WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn

etc. each operating on different capacity. Irrespective of the type of network used in communicating with or to people, we still understand differently, given to the fact that the issue of culture, assumption, emotional sentiments, interruptions and paying less information, cannot be denied. These can equally be understood as a problem of language in pragmatics area.

Language is a means of communication and precisely a means of conveying thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions to humans. Very often, in the interpretation of languages, so many emotions are being exerted by individuals. Chomsky attains that "The language faculty may be regarded as a fixed function, characteristics of the species, one component of the human mind, a function which maps experience into grammar" (Chomsky, 1976). That is to say, language is human, it is what makes us human (Deutscher, G, 2005). According to Whitman, language is "something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys...of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground" (Walt, W. 1885, p 432). Marrying these ideas together, we see that language can be created, whether by emotions or mapping out an experience into grammar, or arising from work, one thing is ascertained, and this is, it must be communicated.

Not far-fetched from the above explanation is, football. Football on its own has been viewed as a means of communication following the wide range of people it has influenced; it is seen as language for some. Pier Pasolini argues that football is "an authentic semiotic system, which frames and expresses culture as a whole", which he calls in Greek, 'Podema' (Pier Pasolini as cited in Donald Fallon, 2018). Football, popularly called as soccer by the Americans is widely played and enjoyed by many. It harmonizes people, countries all around the world. It is said to be the most popular sport played by over 250 million people across 200 countries. Federation

International de Football Association (FIFA) estimated over approximately 250 million football players and 1.3 billion people who are interested in football at the turn of the 21st century. Football is also seen as 'a ritual' by Eduardo P. A. (1992), which makes possible symbolic communication among its participants, it is a cultural rite that takes place all around the world at particular times. This research therefore joins contemporary researchers who use the conversational implicature when interested in the relationship between language and communication as founded Paul Grice. The perspective has the property of conveying an additional level of meaning that goes beyond the semantics meaning of the words uttered (i.e. what is implied varies due to the context of utterance, Thomas, J. 1995).

While there has been much emphasis on theories and approaches used by many scholars to explore pragmatically the use of language, the behavior and the linguistics of communication, however, one can be right to say that both the negative and positive comments made by people online has advantages and disadvantages. This is in consideration to the fact that the impact those comments have in interpreting the dynamics of meanings from such individuals. The study will significantly elicits how pragmatics helps the users get a deeper and clearer understanding of language meaning by revealing the language is used or misused in various social media platforms.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Mochamad, R. F. (2015) explores the Speech Act of request as reflected in the film Office space. The study investigated the types of requests using Trosborg's theory of request. There are four types of requests namely: unconventionally indirect request, conventionally indirect request (hearer-based condition), conventionally indirect request (speaker-based condition), and direct request. He identified the strategies of request such as: hints, questioning hearer's

ability and unwillingness, suggestory formulae, statements of speaker's wishes and desires, statements of obligations and necessities, performatives, and imperatives. This study used both descriptive qualitative and quantitative method to interpret and analyze data to determine the numbers and percentages of the occurrence of the types and request strategies of request. The data of the research are in form of words, phrases, clauses and sentences taken from the dialogues by the characters in Office Space. Moreover, the researcher applied Triangulations through peer discussions and routine consultations. In another attempt, Abdul G. (2010) analyses the speech of a teen with communication disability. Thirteen transcriptions of the subject's interactions with his mother were studied. Such perspective has been taken in Children's Communication Checklist by Bishop, (2000).

The most recent and closely related studies to the present are include Setiyadi, D. et al (2021), who used a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the language attitude of Indonesian football fans on Instagram. They utilize data reduction to identify comments that are based on emotions. The research found three types of football terms, four aspects of social culture, and football fans with positive and negative language attitudes. It also shows that 'participant, setting, topic, and functions are involved into two categories. Olagunju, S. (2016), conducted research on pragmatic function in 2010 world cup football matches in selected print media in Nigeria, creating an understanding of player performance and professional behavior, and also the different types of supports nations provide to the teams in assisting the growth of football as a sport. It is said that that the growth of a club is determined by the impact of the fans. She adopted J. L. Austin's Speech Act theory to find five general acts which are: representatives, directives, expressives, commissives and declarations and ten sub-acts: describing, informing, asking, ordering,

disappointing, thinking, promising, threatening, firing, and declaring account for the pragmatic functions in the data. These acts were used to report soccer-motivated issues such as performance, commending, elimination, world cup campaign fund, football destroying, sending off player, losing match, ball miscalculation, payment of match bonus, defeating, dismissal and qualification. The representatives in the data were used in giving information, narrating, explaining, assessing, describing, asserting, stating and concluding, with respect to reporting issue of performance, commending and elimination. The directive functions were realized by different sub-acts such as asking, directing, warning, ordering and instructing. The expressive functions in the data were realised by the different sub-acts, the expression of emotions and psychological states of the speakers in the texts are realized by different feelings like "sadness", "pains", "shock", "disappointment", "unhappiness" and "thinking", among others. The commissive functions are realised by two different sub-acts: promising and threatening, while declarations in the data were realized by two sub-acts of declaring and firing. She concludes her work by asserting that a good understanding of the discourse of football match reports with insights from the pragmatic approach reveals the pragmatic functions that characterise the genre of football as a sub-genre of sports. This demonstrates how football texts can be best understood by carrying out analysis using Searles speech function model. The study has a pedagogical implication and can be used in developing register for football reports in Nigeria.

Kefas, J. et al (2021) carried out a Linguistic Analysis of Language of Sports Used on Facebook Chats by Nigerian Football Supporters using Dirk Geeraerts's (2009) theory of lexical semantics. The study identified and discussed the literal and contextual meaning of lexis and structure that are solely used in the game of soccer. The

study adopted the descriptive survey, and data were collected from five (5) Facebook chats and twenty-five (25) Facebook sub-chats which were coded Utterances 1-25 (U1-U25). These chats and sub-chats were extracted from four (4) Facebook groups/platforms. Twenty-five (25) sub-chats were purposively screen-shotted and the linguistic features associated with the language of sports were identified, coded and analysed in accordance with the principles of Geeraerts's (2015) theory of lexical semantics. The study found out that Nigerian Football Supporters deploy words and phrases that are peculiarly used in the domain of sports to socially interact on Facebook. The study also concluded that Facebook Chats of Nigerian Football Supporters are preponderant with register of sports (soccer) which could only be used and understood by football fans. Void of the above dimensions, Foer (2004) sees football as a way people think about their identity, and how they organize and express themselves in the global world. It is a "potent source" that involves social groups engaged in status contest just like a political affair.

### **Situating the Problem**

It has been observed that pragmatics studies have largely been explored, precisely the Grice's Maxims. Equally, researches on the language of media have also flooded contemporary linguistics literature. In the world today, scholarly evidence have revealed that a large percentage of people tend to misuse language, which has brought about misunderstandings and violations of the language rules. But of the large number of researches on language use of football supporters, none have so far attempted the recently concluded African cup of Nations (AFCON 2024) which is believed to have exhibited dynamics of language use. By analysing the comments of fans from different social media apps based on their language use and the results of conversational implicature, this research unveils how language is utilised in social interactions to create an implicature

while violating the cooperative principles and maxims. Specifically, studying the use of English language on such communication of large population is very fundamental. Therefore, this work intends to fill that gap to provide an overview on pragmatics analysis of language use, especially in online comments of football viewers. In a clearer term, this study aims to analyse the use of language among online football viewers; investigate the observance and violation of the Cooperative Principles (CP) of the selected online comments.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

The research is basically anchored on the Conversational implicature theory propounded by H. P Grice in his "Logic and Conversation" (1975). Grice distinguishes "Implicature" into two categories: Conventional and Conversational Implicature. These categories both convey additional level of meaning that is beyond the semantic level of meaning uttered. They also differ because Conventional implicature always convey the implicature regardless of the context, while conversational implicature varies from what is implied in accordance to the context of utterance.

Thomas, J. (1995, pp56-58) in his *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics* states that implicatures are properties of utterance, not of sentences, and a word can carry different implicatures on different occasions. This theory deals with implied meaning: how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant. To imply means to hint, suggest or convey meaning indirectly through language. Implicature is intentionally generated by a speaker which may not be understood by the hearer, it is what a speaker means instead of what was said. He further listed out four words that can be seen in conventional implicature: "but, even, therefore, and yet". The latter will be the focus of the present study because it explores the deeper understanding of language use in pragmatics. Grice (1975, p. 25) says that

Conversational implicature are determined by the meaning of a sentence and are connected to what is said rather than the way it is said. It is said that the most widely recognized forms of implicature uses figures of speech like: metaphor, irony, hyperbole, meiosis and litotes (understatement). All these figures of speech help one to identify an implicature in a sentence or word.

### **The Conversational Principles Maxim (Paul Grice)**

Grice in his "Logic and Conversion" introduced four Conversational maxims also known as Gricean maxims and the Cooperative Principle (CP) to explain the methods by which people interpret Conversational implicature. He is of the opinion that there must be a cooperation from both the speaker and the hearer, more like "I play my part, you play your part" and in doing this, everyone must do it truthfully and with simplicity, in a manner that the message will be communicated. The Cooperative Principle is as follows:

"Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [one is engaged in]" (Grice 1975, p. 26).

The Cooperative principle (CP) has four aspects called "maxims", which are as follows: "Quantity", "Quality", "Relation", and "Manner". He goes ahead to explain their various properties.

- The maxim of Quantity: the quantity of information provided by the speaker. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- The maxim of Quality: under this we have a supermaxim 'Try to make your contribution one that is true', followed by two specific maxims:

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

- The maxim of Relation: this has a single maxim – 'Be relevant'.
- The maxim of Manner: 'Be perspicuous.  
Avoid obscurity of expression.  
Avoid ambiguity.  
Be brief.  
Be orderly.

He also suggests that "one might need [the] others" and that there are other kinds of maxims like: "(aesthetics, social, or moral in character), such as 'Be polite'". In all these, our communication and information should be precise and detailed, and it should be based on true facts.

Grice states that people may fail to observe the maxims in various ways, which includes: Violation, opting out, Clashing, and Flouting, he also made mention of a fifth one – Exploitation. He states that speakers fail to observe the maxims, even though they have no desire to generate an implicature. Grice opines that anyone who violates a maxim is "liable to mislead" (p. 49).

A participant can "opt out" from both the maxim and CP, showing the unwillingness to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. Grice uses this example to showing this: I cannot say more; my lips are sealed (p. 49). This shows that the participant is violating the "maxim of quantity". A "Clash" of maxim occurs when a speaker is unable to fulfil the first maxim of Quantity without violating the second maxim of Quality.

A participant can "Flout" a maxim when he "Blatantly" fails to fulfil it. According to Thomas, J. (1975, p. 64), flouting generates an implicature. Flouting can happen at different levels of the maxims: flout which exploits the maxim of Quality is said to occur when the speaker says something which is "blatantly" untrue or lacks adequate evidence. Flout that

occurs when a speaker gives more or less information is said to exploit the maxim of Quantity. One that occurs when a response is obviously irrelevant to the topic in hand exploits that of Relation.

Grice makes mention of other ways one can violate these maxims: infringement – this occurs when a speaker has no intention of generating an implicature, this is because the speaker has an imperfect command of language or his/her performance is impaired due to excitement, drunkenness or the incapability of speaking clearly. He prescribes that the presence of a conversational implicature is only proven by an argument. And to establish that presence, one has to know:

- a) The conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved.
- b) The CP and its maxims.
- c) The context, linguistic or otherwise of the utterance.
- d) Other items of background knowledge
- e) The fact or supposed fact that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case (Grice, p. 50).

To assume the presence of a conversational implicature, we have to assume that the Cooperative Principle is being observed. From the theoretical framework explored above, this study of language use in online comments of football viewers sets to examine how the violations of Grice's maxims affect the use of language to achieve some communicative goal such as identity of race.

### **Methodology**

This study focuses on the use of language and the violation of the rules of the conversational implicature in African Cup of Nation (AFCON 2024). The data for this study consist of twenty-eight online comments from five excerpts on the African Cup of Nation (AFCON 2024) matches from a popular football

Facebook page. Purposive Sampling method, also known as the judgment sampling where researchers use their expertise to select a sample that is most useful to the purpose of the research was adopted. The said method guides the researchers to choose three most relevant posts among the sampled posts. Moreover, the study applied theory of conversational implicature by Grice to analyse the selected online comments of football fans. This study thus, does pragmatic analysis of language use in online comments of football viewers. As for the analysis, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive method as it aims at exploring various ways of violating the Cooperative Principles (CP) and maxims in selected comments of football viewers/fans. The researchers maintained anonymity in respect to the participant's name in adherence to data ethical consideration.

### **Analysis of Football Viewers' Conversational Implicature**

This aspect of the study presents the analysis of discourse or comments on the African Cup of Nation (AFCON 2024) matches to explore the language use among football viewers/fans and to investigate the violation of the cooperative principle and the four maxims. The comments are primarily presented under main excerpts for systematic reference in the analysis. The excerpts are from Facebook, where an active and popular football page with 80,000 (eighty thousand) followers throw questions that attract responses. The page as at the time of the data collection had over 118 posts and no fewer than 550 comments with likes and share for the posts. The analysis is presented under succession below.

**Excerpt one:** It will happen today and tomorrow in group D

- Algeria vs Burkina Faso
- Mauritania vs Angola
- Who is going to win the cup?

Below are the comments sampled under the post:

**Comment 1:** It won't enter penalty kick out. There will be an open win. But I don't know who will

First, the speaker employed an expressive use of language to express an opinion, thereby flouting the maxim of quantity by giving too much information than is required, and irrelevant to the context above. This can be said to have flouted both the maxim of quantity and relation. Consequently, flouting the two maxims creates an implicature.

**Comment 2:** my concern is when the greens can lift the cup

This comment also contains expressive language to express the opinion or viewpoint of the speaker. The comment opts-out of the maxim of relation by giving an irrelevant response to the question at hand, which consequently violates the cooperating principle by making contribution not required in the present context of occurrence. That violation generates an implicature. It can be argued that the language used in this comment implies that the speaker is not referring to any of the teams mentioned above in the question.

**Excerpt two:** The next battle is between South Africa and Morocco on Tuesday 30th January

How do you think it will end?

**Comment 1:** Can Morocco make more history!?

This question flouts the maxim of quantity by providing no or less information to the context at hand. The statement implies that the speaker asking Morocco to make history means that he wants the team to win the cup. The CP is being flouted here, the comment although implies that speaker wishes Morocco to win, the contribution was not such that was required at that level thereby generate implicature.

**Comment 2:** Congratulations SA those guys said they are not Africans....more love from 254

The first perception of viewing the statement is that it flouts the maxim of relation, because the speaker gave an irrelevant response to the topic of discourse. The second view of the response is that the speaker uses a declarative sentence to flout the maxim of quantity. He/she provides less information than is required to categorically say he/she supports South Africa as implied at the end of the statement, "more love from 254". The speaker would have just said that 'South Africa will win the Cup', this would have veered off the comment from violating the maxim of relevance and quantity. Notably seen from this comment, emotion is mostly seen in the language of the fans, where their love for a team supersedes their critical thinking of which team has really done meritoriously well.

**Comment 3:** What is South Africa and Morocco doing here?

These are definitely not the best four teams in the world.

The first statement makes use of an interrogative sentence, asking a question why South Africa and Morocco are even considered among the clubs/teams that will probably win the cup. This implies that the two teams will not win the cup from the speaker's point of view, which is not the expected response to the question on the present match that is not even final. Assuming the question was meant for the finals prediction, there is a flouting of maxim of quality – the speaker gives no evidence why these two teams: South Africa and Morocco are not the best teams in the world, leaving the statement untrue. Therefore, the speaker is said to have generated implicature by that.

**Comment 4:** Sure Bafana Bafana won!

This speaker employs an expressive use of language to flout the maxim of quality which

creates an implicature. The speaker is a fan of South Africa and he/she makes a “stipulation” that lacks evidence and is untrue at the moment. The statement implies that South Africa will win the cup, but the contribution had no evidence to back it up since the match has not been played at the moment. Above that, the match was not even the final. So relation maxim has equally been flouted thereby generating additional implicature.

### Discussion

It has been discovered from the analysis that the cooperative principles (maxims in Grice) have a number of ways one can fail to observe them, which are: flouting, violating, infringing, opting out and suspending. However, flouting has been identified as the prominent way people fail to observe the maxims. From the adopted number of posts and comments being analysed, it has been gathered that in each post there are comments that violated, flouted or opted out of a maxim. For instance, in excerpt one, the quantity maxim was flouted in one (1) instance, the maxim of relation was opted out and flouted in one (1) instance each; and also the maxim of relation was flouted in two (2) instances from the second comment. In excerpt two, the maxim of relation was flouted in two (2) instances while that of quantity was flouted in one (1) instance. Maxim of quantity was flouted in the two instances; while that of relation was flouted in one (1) instance in excerpt three.

In general, the maxim of quantity was flouted in sixteen (16) instances, maxim of quality in two (2) instances, maxim of relation in seven (7) instances. From this analysis, there were four instances of flouting a maxim, and one instance of opting out of a maxim.

### Conclusion

This research has successfully explored Grice’s theory of Conversational implicature, violation of the cooperative principle and maxims in online comment of Football viewers. The techniques and methodology

adopted for the research helped in dealing with the two objectives, leading to the conclusion of the identified generated implicatures in the context of the text at hand. It has been realised from the research findings that violating the maxims is a common practice in the discourse of viewers. It is further discovered that the most preponderant violation are those of quantity and manner. On critical observant of the viewers’ commentary stances, it has been established that such violations are not unconnected to sentimental judgment of the speakers to defend their clubs of interest. It is conclusively assumed that viewers are not ignorant of the cooperating principles or their relevance in coordinating conversation, but obviously fulfilling their communicative purposes of supporting/resisting opposition consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously due to emotional derive.

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