

PRAGMATIC CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND USERS

Emmanuel Chukwudi Ugwu

Department of English Language and Literature,

UNIZIK, Awka Anambra State

ec.ugwu@unizik.edu.ng; +2348066181358

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.10379.82727

Abstract

In every utterance uttered or words written there is this tendency of meanings laying underneath the real surface of the words used. Conversational Implicature incorporates that what is meant often goes beyond what is said and this additional meaning is inferred and predictable. What was said is not actually the problem but the unravelling the intended meaning by the hearer is the greatest challenge. To avoid misconception from both parties: the speaker and the hearer need to come to the terms and understand each other's language during the communication. The work used the theory of conversational implicature with the idea of an attempt to clarify the intuitive difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested or hinted at by an utterance of the same string of words during chats. The data of this work were guided by purposive sample technique and the research was based on texts of the writer or the speaker as he or she originates, forwards, receives and comments on them in chats from Facebook and WhatsApp conversations. It was observed that users of these social media sometimes do not know what actually is going on during the interactions especially the intended meanings behind those posts, they are commenting on. People make choice in doing things with words in this area. Social media are always and ever friendly to the users especially when certain norms peculiar to the conversation are well followed.

Keywords: Conversation, Implicature, Communication, Language, Social Media, Facebook, WhatsApp

Introduction

Communication is the primary purpose of language. Whenever two or more persons interact using language or even in non-verbal means, communication occurs. Communication takes place through channels like face-to-face interaction, town cries, letters, radio, television, fliers, brochures, e-mail and phone calls. In this dispensation, social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram,

Telegram, SnapChat and other ones have been added to the different channels through which people interact.

Ideally, communication comprises a speaker, a message, a listener and a feedback. A speaker sends a message across to the listener through a channel. The listener decodes the message and gives the speaker a feedback. It is important that the listener clearly decodes and understands the message in order to successfully interpret and provide the necessary feedback. If not correctly decoded, effective communication will not take place because feedback will not align with the speakers intended meaning. The speaker, on the other hand, while encoding the message, has to be aware of the hearers face. One has to be careful not to mitigate the hearers face in order to achieve effective communication.

During conversation, the hearer needs to maximise extreme potentials in language use especially the intended meanings, in order to interpret the views in such writings and also the speech used in that environment for conversation. According to Ezeifeka, participants mean more than they actually express in words. They often leave certain meanings implicit (79). It also entails a lot of underlying meaning to untie the knots in the language involved. At times the speaker and the hearer may share background knowledge, attitudes, situations, locations and so on. They may also share mutual context and understanding so that the grammatical construction and language usage will be well understood during their conversations and in their interactions.

In actual sense of use of language in a given social media, do people (reader) understand the gap the writer wants to fill? The writer at some point in time may want to ponder on some ideas or by writing or sharing them as his thoughts to his readers, in some cases the inspiration might be well misconstrued by the next commenters and various interpreters in doing analysis to those ideas of the posters. In filling this gap of implicature in the use of words Horn states thus

Implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is **meant** in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is **said**. What a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what she directly expresses; linguistic meaning radically underdetermines the message conveyed and understood. Speaker S tacitly exploits pragmatic principles to bridge this

gap and counts on hearer H to invoke the same principles for the purposes of utterance interpretation. (3)

To align with their view, Saeed continues in his works to achieve what is known as conversational implicature. Grice had postulated in his earlier works with approach to the speaker's and hearer's cooperative use of inference; that the predictability of inference formation could be explained by postulating a cooperative principle: whereby the speakers and listeners have this kind of tacit agreement and cooperate in communication. He assumes that:

The assumptions that hearers make about a speaker's conduct seemed to Grice to be of several different types, giving rise to different types of inference, or, from the speaker's point of view, implicature. In identifying these Grice called them maxims, and phrased them as if they were injunctions: Do *thus!* This can be misleading: it is important to realise that the conversational principles that Grice proposed are not rules, like phonological or morphological rules, which people have to follow to speak a language; nor are they moral principles. (204)

Indirectly, the speaker or the writer says or writes something which is tantamount to have diverse meaning on the hearer or the reader sequel to what was said or written and what was decoded and understood by various readers. Some words are employed to draw a concluding analogy in the quest for inference to be deduced in the words stated. By the underdetermined the message in question, someone needs to go deeper in the meaning to look for the actual meaning of the thing the user of the words might want to convey. Also, to prove that actual order the words might flow or express has been achieved as Ariel states “[u]nderdeterminacy is an inherent characteristic of human language, since no natural language sentence can encode interlocutors' intended statements fully” (265).

The actual problem is not what was said but the unravelling of what is the intended meaning on what was said. It may cause some to react negatively towards the context of analysis and discussion. Grice points that “what is said cannot be equated with pure linguistic meaning but rather is closely related to the conventional meanings of the language used during the utterance or in writing”

(44). So for one to be able to analyse the implicature, a lot has to be played and certain indices must be put into consideration to obtain the real analogy of the intended speech or written words meaning: the force in the speech and senses related to the writing. Leech in his own account was able to analyse that one cannot ultimately be assured of what a speaker or a writer means in their utterances or writing. So a closer observation will determine what the speaker's intended meaning is all about and the message he wants to pass which at times can result to assumption and other guess work and Leech illustrated them using the followings:

A: When is Aunty Rose's birthday?

B: It's sometime in April.

The sense of the reply is simply a proposition to the effect that Aunt Rose's birthday occurs in April (it could have been expressed in the form of a long disjunction. *It's either on the first of April, or on the second of April. or ...*). But A will derive from it an additional piece of meaning: *viz.* that B doesn't know the exact date of the birthday ... How is the extra meaning, or implicature, arrived at? The following are the three main stages:

(i) The *prima-facie* observation is that there is something 'up' with B's reply. B does not give the right amount of information for A's needs. That is, B has apparently violated the CP (especially, the Maxim of Quantity).

(ii) There is, however, no reason to suppose that B is being deliberately uncooperative. Therefore, A can reasonably assume that B is observing the CP, and that this apparent breach of the Quantity Maxim is due to A's wish to uphold the CP at another point. Therefore, we must look for a reason why the CP should cause B to give less information than A needed.

(iii) This reason can be supplied on the grounds that B was trying to uphold the Maxim of Quality. Suppose that B is observing the CP and that B does not know when her birthday is, except that it is in April. Then B will not randomly state that her birthday is in any particular day of April, since to do so, although it would uphold the Maxim of Quantity, would be to

violate the Maxim of Quality in order to avoid telling lies. Therefore, to be on the safe side, *B* will merely say that the birthday is in April. In the absence, of any other explanation, this explanation will be accepted as consistent with the CP. Therefore, it will be concluded that *B* does not know which day in April is her birthday. (30-31)

From Leech's above observation, it is believable that language users on social media always work under assumptions on various posts. The implicature lies that the lots of replies are filled with hypothesis of guessing the mind of the writer and even answer to imply on certain assumptions. The implicature may be conversational in nature towards the questions and can operate in such area of guess work along the line of conversing, until the actual intentions and purposes are met. Green posits that, "It arises from the assumption that it is reasonable (under the particular circumstances of the speech event in question) to expect the addressee to infer that the speaker intended the addressee to recognize the speaker's intention from the fact that the speaker uttered whatever the speaker uttered (424)." Recanati, (457) states also that "There are aspects of meaning that are not part of the literal content of the utterance. Those aspects of meaning are not aspects of what is said. Rather, the speaker manages to communicate them indirectly, BY saying what she says." Bach on his contrary view to conversational implicature utilise the violation which presumably may lead to the successful aspect in the discussion in line with the aspects of Grice's analogy of having successful communication during conversation. He is of the view that:

Grice made progress in explaining what this ability involves, as in his account of conversational implicature ... such as when one says of an expensive dinner, "It was edible," and implicates that it was mediocre at best. Grice proposed a Cooperative Principle and several maxims which he named, in homage to Kant, Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner His account of implicature explains how ostensible violations of them can still lead to communicative success. Although Grice presents them as guidelines for how to communicate successfully, I think they are better construed as presumptions (they should not be construed, as they often are, as sociological generalizations). (471)

The height of flouting in conversation always arrives at the peak of breaching the communication gap in interactions. So the conversation can go weird once the two parties fail to understand the maxims needed to follow in their discussion. Intentions of a given post needed to be understood to avoid flouting the implicature. but in the course of conversation there is room for such ruptures. A.K. Greenall in his assertion on flouting states, "A seeming breach will trigger a reasoning process whereby the hearer will try to come up with a meaning for the utterance that turns it into an act of observing the given maxim(s) (an implicature)" (570). It is like a situation of critical literary analysis were the analysts give diverse opinion about a work even beyond the originator's imagination.

Although one needs to be cooperative in the speech and in conversation, so that one needs not to flout in the course of reply on a given conversation. Much observations have been noticed especially using Facebook's reactionary icons to flout in some posts. For an example one posted about a death on social media which requires sad icon but you see people flouting the message with like icon. Note that currently Facebook has added extra five reactionary icons instead of the usual like icons.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theory of *Conversational Implicature* is attributed to Paul Herbert Grice, who observes that in conversations what is meant often goes beyond what is said and this additional meaning is inferred and predictable. Most of the body of Grice's work consist in an attempt to clarify the intuitive difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested or hinted at by an utterance of the same string of words. According to Grice, the sum of what is said in a sentence and what is implicated in an utterance of the same sentence is called "the total signification of an utterance" (14).

Implicature itself is meant to cover a number of ways in which literally unsaid information can be conveyed. Grice proposes that participants in a communicative exchange are guided by a principle that determines the way in which language is used with maximum efficiency and effect to achieve rational communication. He calls it the Cooperative Principle which he states thus: 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 you are engaged. This cooperative principle is an umbrella term for nine components that guide how we communicate. These nine components are grouped together into four categories, called the Maxims of Conversation: the maxim of quality (truthfulness), the maxim of quantity (informativeness), the maxim of relation (relevance), and the maxim of manner (perspicuity).

Methodology

The methodology focused on conversational implicature. This was done to look at the hidden meanings behind the posts, and some of the pragmatic strategies employed by these posters.

Since purposive sample style guided this work and the research was based on texts of the writer or the speaker as he or she originates, forwards, receives and comments on them. Qualitative method of data analysis was used to ascertain already established and discussed pragmatics concept on conversational implication.

These analyses focused on realising how people do things with words at the various stages of the language usage in the social media. The data were analysed with descriptive analysis of the texts generated from the posts and comments.

Analysis of the Data Collected

Some data were collected in the course of this article and they were analysed using concepts of pragmatic conversational implicature. The data were basically analysed using the research question generated in the course of the research. These data were collated within the areas of the social media: Facebook and WhatsApp. The posts were made between 2018 and 2020 on those social media. Their comments were lifted and unedited with

What implicatures are realised in social media chats?

Most posts in social media fall into the category of what has poster posted, the meaning and what the post implies? Then the general outcome of the post and how the readers were able to grasp the information passed through the post(s).

The researcher posted these words on his Facebook page, on 12th March 2018. But carefully did not mention any name and the five comments the post got implicated that they understood the post even when no name was mentioned. It shows that they shared privileged knowledge about the post and the environment they belonged.

Emmanuel Chukwudi Ugwu

Do not forget that he was treated of ear problem, so if he gat to know today that his orders were not obeyed:

Kindly bear with him

Celestine Obi

No be only ear problem, I think his brain need total Overhauling, to upgrade his reasoning and thinking ability. Unfortunately, he has little time to make any meaningful impact even if we succeed in rejuvenating him.

Desmart Kalumalu Orakaeze

You are not serious.

Anosike Chinedu

What a shameful choice we made! 2019, let's use our PVC..

Abuoma Agajelu

The man showcases his incompetence daily and actually advertises it as if it is a virtue

Obiorah Chinyere

Hmm

The first in the list from Celestine, came up with more insights of going for overhauling of the brain, instead of stopping at ear surgery the said figure underwent. He was of the negative face that he has little time to make meaningful impact, even if every support is given to him succeed.

Desmart careful stated that the poster is not serious just to save face. Note that sometimes on social media one needs to save face. To avoid threatening any face implicature needs to play out and the discussion will be mild and welcoming.

The third comment was negatively impolite in his comment. He tries to support the original post and also blame everybody as the cause of the woes they are

facing. He made a suggestion of using PVC by next year to do the needful. Still it is only person in that circle that will still understand the ideas he is suggesting.

Pragmatically and doing things with words the fourth on the list was brunt to state that man showcases incompetent on daily basis. The implicature lies here what has the poster written and what did he meant and the implication on the post. He the reply accepted that there is a man in question who still revolve around the post. He implied that the incompetence is threatened to become a virtue.

The last on the list just made a cue which by implication is of the view that every comment is somehow accepted by her. She simply attested to the post and comments that followed. Despite that she was not explicit like others to air her view but decided to be welcoming the others already suggested by others. Note that hmm can be supporting or refuting.

The researcher, also has once met two colleagues arguing over a post he made on a WhatsApp both belonged on the idea of different interpretation of the meaning behind the researcher's comment on a given post. The post was made on 28th January 2019, attached to a picture of various items meant for what a man will provide before he can be given a wife to marry in a particular town and her traditional marriage rites, (*Igbo traditional marriage at a glance from south east states*). The researcher commented and appreciated the town he married from but unfortunately these two colleagues of him later meet offline and the discussion was rolled over with more details of the meaning of the comment from the researcher. Coincidentally, one of the colleagues was from the same town. So the researcher later went back to tag the post where his name was mentioned and comment again to solve the implicature already established among the other members of the group unknowingly. He later on 4th February 2019 tagged the reply of 4a in other to expatiate further on his reply 3 which was misunderstood. Below are the excerpts of the discussion from the WhatsApp group.

Reply 1: I think Anambra is the most economical 🍌🍌🍌

Reply 2: Ya (Tagging reply 1)

Reply 3: It can only happen in Alor Town

Lemme kom and go and be going oo 🚶🏃‍♂️

Before people will pounce on me (Tagging reply 1)

Reply 4: Hahaa (Tagging reply 3)

Reply 4a: Emma nwayoo kwaa

Reply 5: What is depicted for Anambra is fa fa foul !

Even Zeeby Alias 4.30 will testify to its falsehood 😂😂😂😂

Reply 6: Nwayoo gini?

At least AlorLondon gives their daughter almost free to their inlaws.

I am witness oo

Bachelors in this group don't be left out. 😊😊😊 (Tagging reply 4a)

Justin Daniels on Facebook's timeline on June 8 2020 and made a wonderful submission on what usually go on social media with a picture of where corns and pears are being roasted in usual homemade style beside tripod kitchen fire. But the major comments implicated and centred mostly on the picture with despite the numerous listing of various acts on Facebook, the post stated thus with its replies:

Justin Daniels

Welcome to Facebook where people that are trekking are trying to sell you cheap cars through custom auction.

Welcome to Facebook where poor people are trying to make you rich through Bitcoin, binomo, binary and co.

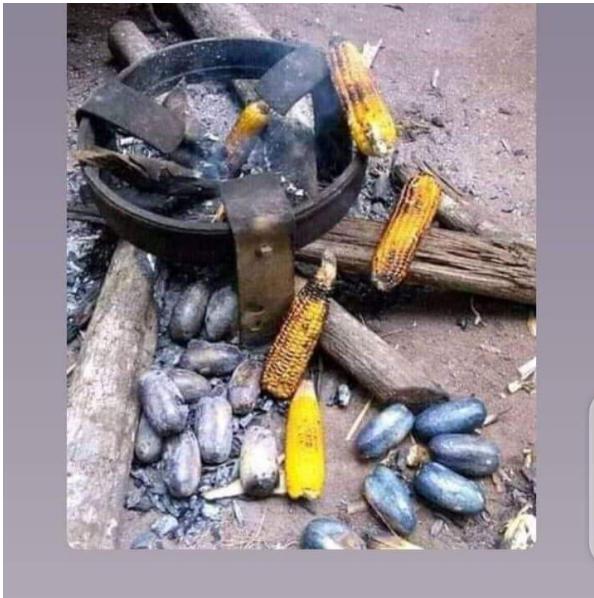
Welcome to Facebook where you are under a curse for not typing Amen to prayers by people who need prayers themselves.

Welcome to Facebook where men are all over small small girls inbox thanking them for accepting their friends request.

Welcome to Facebook where people who should have helped you now call you boss because of fake life.

The list is endless; you can add yours. Welcome to Facebook.

You can join me, I dey roast corn and pear. (*The Picture below was attached to the above post*)



Here, the most relevant comments and replies were lifted and analysed:

Maryjane Ojirinnaka

Every body with his or her own way of life, don't mind them but am salivating already

The ↗Author Justin Daniels

Maryjane Ojirinnaka haha

From above there is the impicature of stating the fact about those edible there with the idea of not requesting to be given but already salivating. Though Maryjane has stated her impicature of the said post on what people usually do on facebook. The Author just replied with only haha that is laughter especially for the assumption of her.

Bukky Ogunsanya

See better combo now...those pears though, chai who dey do me this thing ohh

↗Author

Justin Daniels

Bukky Ogunsanya

they are rainy season compliant.

Bukky Ogunsanya

Justin Daniels

I dey tell you

The comments and replies of the Author and Bukky implicate that the major info on the post was not attended to but the pictures attached to the post attracted their conversation. Especially implicating that corn and pear are suitable during drops of rain and cold hours.

Maria Ibe

Interested in this corn and pear 🍐

✍Author Justin Daniels

Maria Ibe wait till December. 😅

Maria Ibe

Justin Daniels Awwww! That's too far...

The conversation here implicates understanding among the Author and Maria as people who know each other beyond Facebook and they definitely will meet during December when they may return to their place in order to grant the wishes Maria requested. Though one may have noticed that picture attached to the post is not directly from the Author Justin and there is no way he can provide the request to Maria since these are edible and cannot be provided at the very moment of request. Also notice the ellipsis in the last content of Maria's comment which implies that some words are yet to be said on the conversation box.

Eguriase Ovie

I am watching and waiting for you to finish and leave... I have a bag full of corn 🌽 to roast all night...

✍Author Justin Daniels

Eguriase Ovie I'm coming over.

Eguriase Ovie

Justin Daniels coming over to do what again sir ?

Justin Daniels

To collect the bag full of .

Eguriase Ovie

hahahaha

The conversation here added little comical aspect to ease down the post by Ovie which he brought in a situation of bringing in a bag of full of corn including the image of a full corn. Is he actually watching the poster as he was typing and uploading the post and picture? One can imply the actual meaning of going over to Ovie's house by the Author to collect the bag and the question from him including his final hahahaha exhibited, showing that someone is seriously joking to other one, which finally elucidated laughter.

Prince Clovis

You look at the negative side of Facebook. You don't even mention the positive side. Welcome to Facebook where you can reach the unsaved with the Gospel. Welcome to Facebook where you can win soul online and minister to over 300000soul at onve

✍Author Justin Daniels

Prince Clovis

Facebook definitely has its positive sides. Lot more than the few you mentioned. Thanks a lot.

Prince Clovis

Justin Daniels Thanks

The implicature brought in by Clovis, in his remarks implies that what Justin was implying that most things he enumerated are in negative perspectives but ended up implying that major achievement on Facebook ought to be preaching the Gospel, winning souls and for over three hundred thousand people listening to the preacher. The author also tagged him to explain that definitely Facebook has

other positive sides and also unscratched. Finally, both agreed in affirmation of appreciation in the exchange of their ideas.

Andy Omelihu

Hahahahah.abeg I need my share oooo

☞Author Justin Daniels

Andy Omelihu

onye Ozizi.

The comment above seems to arrive first after the post was made. When one observes the reply of the author of the post which reads “onye Ozizi” meaning first person which implicates first comment to the post. The reply from Andy was able to ignore the message the author trying to pass about the post and focused on picture attached to the post, by replying with long laughter and ended up adding that he needed his own share from the corn. Here, he implicates that first demand at the concluding part of the post is not that important to him, but last request of the post.

Temi Comfort Ademola

Like seriously sir. I hiss at such instances & move on.

☞Author Justin Daniels

Temi Comfort Ademola

it's sad

Temi here considers the post and added her grievances on those things happening on Facebook as the sad enumerated. She is of the view that those things in a serious way but always hiss which implies ignoring the total and continue to move on to avoid been distracted. Then the author tagged her to concur with sadness to the helpless situation of the acts.

Chia Paul

Wow this is good I missed it

☞Author Justin Daniels

Chia Paul

delicacy

The above comment also played that he is more interested on the same picture of the post. He posited that he has missed the roasting food considering the time of the reply came in, consider his exclamation of "wow" and the author tagged and replied that it is delicacy. The idea remains that the food is wholesome represented with acceptance as wonderful food. Notice also that in the next data author replied with the same delicacy but qualifies it with great.

Chichi Okoye

Na this corn and pears I want oh!

☞Author Justin Daniels

Chichi Okoye

great delicacy.

Chichi supported the previous data and states that she wants the corn and pears. It implicates that one corn and more than a pear are what she wants, that a pear can make do with a corn but several of the pears. The author understands her request and supported her that her demands are well noted and that the request is in right direction.

Uche Ojinnaka Onuchukwu

Make I come collect my own ooooooo

☞Author Justin Daniels

Uche Ojinnaka Onuchukwu

carry pear dey come o, na only corn remain.

In the last data, one will understand the drama that actually played on in that comment. Here Uche laid emphasis on the need to partake in the sharing by observing her last word with great emphatic o. the author was fast enough to remind her that while coming to pick corn, she should come with pear. Note that in Chichi's request above he made mention of collecting corn and pears. So it implicates that Uche's coming will be right if she comes with pear because most people who came earlier might have picked most of the pears leaving behind only corns at the fire.

E-StarQueen Hadassah Chineneonodu

Leave all those fb matter, na that you corn and pear be the main matter. How this one fit take reach me

Obiageli Sylvia

The thing taya pesin ooo

 Author Justin Daniels

Obiageli Sylvia

as in eh, e really tire me o aunty.

Here, she strongly acknowledged the post made by the author about Facebook but was of opinion that the main focus is on the items on the picture and how she can get access to them. A quick reply came from Obiageli to support her on disgusting aspect of those style and manner of the posts on Facebook as the author initiated. The author also supported the last reply since she is more concerned on the post instead of the picture. The author addressing her as aunty also implicates the close relation in Obiageli, without a reply to Hadassah's comment and request as he has been doing in others.

Precious Gonum Shebbs

No bi small tin oo, d Amen own na wahala.

 Author Justin Daniels

Precious Gonum Shebbs

no be small thing.

Here Precious singled out the point on not typing Amen implicates or attracts curse to the person who refused typing, as most problematic and annoying one among them. The curse aspect of the impudicature is really worrisome as the Author is of the view that those request for the Amen are the ones needed the prayers more often. The Author also agrees with the reply to her as real problematic one.

Ademola Clinton Adebare

Welcome to face book where you can set up your business to reach the potential buyers, welcome to Facebook where you get the real customers to your potential buyers.... It's all depends on how you make use of your Facebook...

 Author Justin Daniels

Adebare Ademola

sure

The Author's request on the reader adding the list of what goes on Facebook since they are endless. Clinton here did justice to the request and push more on a positive welcome side unlike juxtaposition of the Author's points and concluded that: "It's all depends on how you make use of your Facebook..." and ended it with ellipsis since others can still come up with other contrasting points. The Author simple replied "sure" implicating that no one has the monopoly of meaning to given idea on social media like Facebook.

Conclusion

The work has tried to make its own impact in pragmatics world through conversational impicature by using the scale in social media. People make choice in doing things with words in this area. Social media are always and ever friendly to the users especially when certain norms peculiar to the conversation are well followed.

Basically, conversational implicature was employed to boost the work and see what happen as people respond to issue on social media. How they present their languages, when they are conversing with their peers. Even discussing with superiors, also how superiors manage their subjects with words during conversation on social media

Works Cited

Ariel, Mira. *Pragmatics and Grammar*. Cambridge: CUP, 2008. Print.

Bach, Kent. "Pragmatics and Philosophy of Language" *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Eds. Horn, Laurence R. and Gregory Ward. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 463-87. Print.

Ezeifeka, Chinwe. *Discourse Analysis: Concepts and Approaches*. Awka: Patrobas Nigeria Ltd. 2018. Print.

Greenall, A. K. "Maxims and Flouting" *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*. 2nd ed. Ed.

Mey, Jacob L. Oxford: Elsevier Ltd., 2009. 569-572. Print.

Grice, Herbert Paul. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: HUP. 1989. Print.

IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 7. No. 3. (2021)

ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Tansian University, Umunya

Horn, Laurence R. "Implicature." *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Eds. Horn, Laurence R. and Gregory Ward. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 3-28. Print.

Leech, Geoffrey N. *Linguistics: Principle of Pragmatics*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1983. Print

Recanati, François. "Pragmatics and Semantics." *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Eds. Horn,

Laurence R. and Gregory Ward. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 442-462. Print.