

---

## **Pragmatic analysis of students' performance at the Polytechnic of Namibia**

*Sarala Krishnamurthy, Elina Ithindi, Alec Brewis and Juliet Eiseb*

### **Abstract**

Pragmatics has been described as the analysis of language taking into account the socio-cultural context in which it is used. In other words, it is the study of language of a particular region which reveals the influence of mother tongue and other cultural aspects. While pragmatic analysis can be done in many ways, this paper focuses on discussions that take place in the class room. Our subjects are students of the Polytechnic of Namibia who are expected to participate in classroom discussions as part of their formative assessment. This paper explores the relative success of classroom discussions according to the proficiency level of the students with a view to identifying and improving their interactions both in the classroom and in a societal setting.

### **1. Introduction**

Pragmatics is that branch of linguistics which extends beyond the syntactic structure of a sentence to examine meaning. Many times ambiguity is created because the context in which a sentence has been uttered is indeterminate. In order to completely understand a sentence or utterance, therefore, sometimes it is necessary to examine the context in which the sentence is uttered. Any pragmatic analysis entails an examination of the speech patterns in order to explicate the different forms. Many theories have been developed to understand and analyse speech. In today's world, especially in the second language context, it is necessary to study speech patterns to determine the success of coherent communication.

### **2. Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to analyse the speech patterns of students speaking English at the Polytechnic of Namibia. This analysis makes use of Pragmatic analysis as outlined by Grice(1989), with particular emphasis on the four maxims described by him.

### **3. Significance of the study of maxims**

Maxims can be adapted to teach writing by providing teachers and students with a way of understanding successful and unsuccessful written and spoken communication. They can be used in both mono and cross-cultural settings. They enable both the writer and the reader to understand cultural differences when analysing speech patterns. They are therefore guidelines on how to understand and communicate successfully.

### **4. Review of Literature**

According to Yule (2003:1) pragmatic analysis takes into consideration four main areas of study: speaker meaning, contextual meaning, how more gets communicated than is said and finally, it is the study of the expression of relative distance. Therefore it is possible to study the intentions of a speaker, the underlying assumptions, the

implications and finally the effects of any utterance. While he admits that it is difficult to always explain the conversational utterances in a systematic way, there are certain patterns which can be identified in conversations.

According to the philosopher, H.P. Grice (1975), conversations take place successfully because humans follow a behavioural command, which he called the cooperative principle. This can be seen as the commitment between speakers and listeners, to work together to create meaningful conversations. As stated by H.P. Grice's "Logic and Conversation" (1975): Make your conversational contributions as 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.

Grice came up with the following conversational maxims:

- quantity: speaker is as informative as required. Making strong statements
- quality: speaker tells the truth or provable by adequate evidence
- relation: response is relevant to the topic of discussion
- manner: speakers avoid ambiguity or obscurity, is direct and straightforward

According to Sperber and Wilson(1995) all maxims which have been described by Grice can be reduced to maxim of relevance, since, in order for a successful communication to take place, relevance is very important. The principle of relevance is applied without any exception. Sperber and Wilson(ibid) state that the purpose of communication is not to "duplicate thoughts", but to "enlarge mutual cognitive environments"(193). The oral exchange between the addresser and addressee actually requires minimum effort for the process of communication to be completed. Trask(1998) points out that a hearer interprets what is said by finding an accessible context that produces "the maximum amount of new information with the minimum amount of processing effort"(58). Joan Cutting (2002:44) opines that Relevance theory has its limitations because it cannot make a meaningful contribution about interactions where cultural and social dimensions are included. Brown and Levinson's(1987) study on politeness describes the notion of "face" which is the self-image or public perception of self in conversations. They formulate what they call "face threatening acts"(FTAs) which entail a choice to react positively or negatively in any situation. Positive politeness strategies aim to save positive face. Leech (1983) lists six maxims which encompass both conversational maxims and the politeness principle. They are tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy.

### **3. Background**

English was adopted as the official language of Namibia during its independence in 1989. The Cambridge Education system was implemented after Independence in 1990. In addition, the teaching methodology changed to the communicative approach. While in the beginning this was considered to be a success, it was only after two decades that educationists are realising the havoc that this system of education

has wreaked on a whole generation of learners. The communicative approach has impacted the teaching of grammar. Now more than ever, the education system is facing the reality of neglecting a systematic teaching of grammar. Learners leave school with relatively good communicative skills but with quite poor writing skills. As a result of gaps in their grammar competence many students find it difficult to write sentences and paragraphs that are coherent and of an acceptable standard. This results in their writing "falling apart" when they construct lengthy paragraphs since there is no cohesion within the paragraphs. Students often lack basic grammatical structures in order to express themselves clearly on paper. Some of the most notable aspects are major difficulties with subject –verb agreement (concord), prepositions and their correct usage, pronouns and the use of articles.

All first time students at the Polytechnic of Namibia write an English placement test. This test determines the English reading, grammar and writing competence of the students. Students are placed in a relevant English level, depending on the results, which will best address the specific needs of the students to improve their English proficiency. The majority of the Namibian students had the communicative approach at school. Lecturers observed that foreign international students exhibit a higher level of English proficiency. All students should conduct formal and informal conversations and display good writing skills. However, lecturers further observed that students have good verbal skills but poor writing skills. In addition, students lacked the ability to construct adjacency pairs. They would express their opinion without linking it to a previous statement. It further appeared as if students struggled to create logical rational sentences. Students would be inclined to be verbose. Moreover, students relied on conducting informal conversations.

#### **4. Statement of the problem/Hypothesis**

Since English is, in most cases, their second or even third language, non-first language English speakers violate most of the Gricean Maxims during the use of English because they struggle to formulate sentences. The reason for this could be that they are thinking in their first language. Once they formulate their sentences and are ready to utter them, there is a sequencing problem. This leads to the flouting of maxims; probably, mostly, the maxim of manner, where clarity is the issue. It is believed that students with a lower level of English competence will violate different maxims, or violate certain maxims more often, than students with a higher level of competence.

#### **5. Research Questions**

In order to determine whether students violate the Gricean maxims, the following research questions were posed and the methodology of the research was determined by these questions. Four questions formed the basis of the research namely:

- i) Which of the 4 Gricean maxims were flouted?
- ii) How often were these maxims flouted?
- iii) Is there a difference between f2f and online student performance?

iv) Why were certain maxims flouted more than others?

## **6. Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study were to determine whether:

- i) All four Gricean Maxims are flouted by multilingual speakers, whose L1 is not English, regardless of their level of English competence. The maxims flouted are maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner.
- ii) Speakers with a lower level of English competence flout certain maxims more often than students with a higher level of competence, and vice-versa.
- iii) There are definite reasons why certain maxims are flouted by speakers of a certain competency level.
- iv) Certain maxims are flouted more than others.

## **Delimitations of the study**

There were three main delimitations to this study. They are the choice of subjects (students), the choice of discussion topics, and accuracy of language use. The first delimiting issue was the choice of subjects. There was no specific criteria that was used to select the participants for each discussion group other than their belonging to a certain course level. The students were selected randomly and not according to the country they belonged to or the ethnic group. Secondly, discussion topics were selected randomly; there was no rationale for the selection of topics. Any topic dealing with burning local or global issues was used for the discussions, depending on the level of the course. Finally, accuracy of language forms and usage was not also considered in the analysis. The focus was on the flouting of the maxims, not on grammatical and phonological errors. Furthermore, all pauses and hesitations were normalised for the purposes of convenience.

Even though the flow of communication was disjointed in both face-to-face and online discussions, the analysis of disjointed talk patterns was not undertaken for this study. The study was to analyse the flouting of Paul Grice's four maxims. No proper turn-taking took place in both face-to-face and online discussions. With regards to online discussions, it is difficult to figure out to whom a particular student was talking as a number of messages could be posted concurrently.

## **6. Research Methodology**

A pragmatic analysis of the speech of students at the Polytechnic of Namibia was done in order to analyse the patterns of conversation. Students from Modules 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 were taken for this study. Students from Module 5 were excluded from this study as Module 5 concentrates exclusively on business related writing skills. There is no emphasis on speaking. Module 6 is called "Professional Communication" and focuses on business related communication skills.

Module 1 students study Basic English. Module 3 students are at an intermediate level of English and Module 6 students are the ones doing Advanced English since

Module 6 is an exit level course. All the groups were assigned topics for discussion in class. One group of student who undertook online discussion were also examined to determine whether they flouted any of Gricean maxims. All students were drawn from the class groups that they were in randomly without taking into consideration the country, region or ethnic group that they belonged to. This was done mainly to recreate a situation as close to reality as possible since all classes at the Polytechnic are multi lingual and multicultural.

During the study an audio recording was made of the speech patterns. All speech samples were transcribed as accurately as possible indicating pauses, repetitions and more. A grid was used to indicate where students flouted the relevant maxim. (For the purpose of this article, the focus will be on the findings encapsulated by the grid and not on the grid itself).

The Module 1 class consisted of Namibians and Angolans. The class was given time to prepare on the topic: **Corporal punishment** since they are lower level learners of English. Speakers were allowed to speak until they exhausted any further comments they could give.

### **Module 1: Corporal punishment.**

**Student A:** Corporal punishment (CP), must be banned because some of the teachers use it in schools and the children .....are afraid to go to school because the teacher beat him and some of the teachers use it in school and this is .....very bad because the students are afraid to go to school. (*Maxim of manner: too wordy and not orderly presentation of ideas; Maxim of quantity: too much information, repetition*).

**Student A:** They will their father leave them in the door and they don't go in the school because they are afraid of the .....teacher. (*Maxim of relevance; it is not clear what the father is supposed to do. This sentence distracts the listener's attention from the original idea that children are afraid of teachers. The listener will have to determine the actual role of the father*).

**Student B:** So, I think CP should not be banned it's one form to make discipline at home and at schools cause .....sometimes the children has misbehaviour and the teachers and the parents use the CP to punish them. (*Maxim of quantity;; giving too much information. The speaker could have made a stronger statement*).

**Student B:** The children in other times in schools can beat their colleagues (*Maxim of manner; new vocabulary, wrong word causes confusion*) and the teacher use CP to correct them. So .....in at home the parents use it to punish the misbehaviour of that children present. So when the children .....have misbehaving at home when the parent said don't do this or don't do things wrong and this children ....doing the same thing (*Maxim of quantity: too much information*) then the parent punish the misbehaviour of that children and...(Maxim of manner: the first part is very confusing. The second part is long-winded).

**Student C:** So, now we are going to talk about this gynaecologist talk about you. (*Maxim of relevance and manner. Maybe the student recently learnt this new word*

and wanted to display his ability to use other vocabulary. It is clear that the student used the wrong word. Further, the utterance is extremely confusing).

**Student D:** ...must be banned at school cause as my colleague who is standing here by my side has said (*Maxim of manner; rambling*) already how can you force a horse to drink water ?(*Maxim of relevance .The student tried to use his knowledge of idioms but failed to link the idiom correctly*). It's very difficult to ....maintain children or students at school change their... him or her from original behaviour eh. (*Maxim of quality. The student failed to produce the evidence to support this statement*). - So I see corporal punishment as be banned at school cause children corporal punishment abuse the school ...(Maxim of manner: confusing).

**Student E:** ... it will be very difficult for students to participate in class even if a lecture asks a questions in class ....students would be afraid to raise up their hands say what he knows, children express his views on that ....topic,...(*Maxim of manner: ambiguous in meaning. Are the children expressing their views on the questions asked by the lecturer or are the students expressing their view on being afraid of the lecturer?*)

**Student F:** ...so corporal punishment must be banned at school if a student fails or fails or doesn't ....performs well at school (*Maxim of manner: prolix, also confusing*) er as I say what you sow is what you .... harvest.. er himself (*Maxim of relevance: failing to clearly link the idiom to the expression*) her him will ....regret at the end of the year what he has been doing at school.(*Maxim of manner: very confusing. Who will be regretful?*)

**Student D:**.. cause sometimes we are have those children in our house that has a bad behaviour and we must .....interview with CP so that they can learn something, (*Maxim of relevance: using 'interview' instead of 'intervene' creates an entirely different perception of the required action*) because we must we need to ....educate our children from our house right things just like if you say something you must act you must do .....something children they must learn sometimes we must interview with the bad with a corporal punishment, (*Maxim of manner: ideas are not presented in an orderly manne*)] and we have also... the police they ....sometimes have to interview with corporal punishment so that they can learn and do the right things. (*Maxim of manner: very confusing; Maxim of quantity: too much information*).

### Module 3: HIV/AIDS infected students enrolled at Polytechnic

The Module 3 class study an intermediate level of English. The class consisted of a fair distribution of the various ethnic groups in Namibia with an equal male female ratio. The students had no time to prepare on the topic: "Should HIV/AIDS infected students be allowed to enrol at Polytechnic?" Students decided that during the discussion the next speaker would be the one who had raised her/his hand.

**Student A:** Uhm this is MC. It's all about the requirement of Polytechnic you know once aha you have to be HIV ...negative to be accepted to the Polytechnic the Polytechnic of Namibia, aha, that is my opinion so I don't know to .....you... other guys. And then if you are HIV positive you should do it distance you know distance learning....otherwise not be exposed with those people who are negative. (*Maxim*

of manner: prolix and confusing especially the last part).

**Student B:** What I'm... uhm... I think what... uhm.... HIV or AIDS is increasing in Polytechnic it's because people don't ....understand we are only pretending that we don't understand but generally we don't understand. (*Maxim of manner: confusing*).

**Student A:** I think it's... uhu ... girls... cause girls are so easy. Once they are HIV positive they are easy to get. (*Maxim of quality: no evidence to support the statement*).

**Student C:** Okay, ha....I think we should blame ourselves cause we are we are actually the ones that are ignorant about ....the whole think we don't want to understand that HIV' is real and sometimes we tend to ignore what ...what people are saying about the virus and the advice we are getting. (*Maxim of quantity: the same idea could have been presented with a stronger statement*).

**Student D:** If you know you are positive you can't take a course like engineering its obvious there you can't work with... heavy things if you are not healthy. (*Maxim of quality. Student presents an opinion as a fact*)... then the other point is that the people who have to be blamed is ourselves because you don't want to put ourself ...in public so that to be seen ....this one is positive so I can't go out or things like that. (*Maxim of manner: ambiguous*).

**Student E:** Ah... now this becomes a long term planner ah... but much have been done HIV campaigns whatever HIV ...awareness club are here (*Maxim of manner: confusing*) but so nothing has been done. (*Maxim of quality: no evidence to support to prove that nothing has been done*).

**Student F:** And just to add on that I think... ne... it's going to be very much clear cause if I would've meet you and ask ...you where are you studying? And you tell me no... I'm studying at the Polytechnic then I will have to go ... I i k e ... . how come I don't see you on campus and they answer... no ....I'm distance, it already means that you are negative positive the moment you are say you are studying distance the moment you are studying on a distance thinginkie level it means that you are... you are positive so it will be clear for everybody who and.... who is negative or positive. (*Maxim of manner: verbose; Maxim of quantity: too much information*).

**Student D:** I'm against the points given to the other guy that students must be must those who are positive must ....be must be.... must take distance education but it is not fair... now we are... we isolate them from us ...which.... who are negative but is it not really good ? (*Maxim of manner: the listener has to assume a lot to create meaning*).

**Student G:** Ja this issue why it's increasing the issue of HIV AIDS... sometimes.... its people.... they doesn't care anymore, nowadays if I'm infected I want to take at least 10 people along with me so that I can they can go with me also I can't go alone on this world because I must have to go with someone. (*Maxim of quantity overlapping with maxim of manner: the student could have made a stronger statement. The utterance is very long*).

**Student H:** ...sometime you also don't have lunch money then you sell yourself in order to get that money so that you can have something on your stomach...*(Maxim of relevance: the student has failed to clearly link this topic to previous statements).*

**Student I:** ...all I want to say this issue of addressing HIV whatever I like ...people are getting bored you know . We are forever telling people use condoms... do what... abstain maybe.... but we are not doing it in a way you know use to enjoy it so I suggested we must do it in entertaining way where you know anyone can laugh and you people take the messages when you know something its entertaining them so the way they are laughing they take the message in their head and they are going to practice it. This using of condoms I also have abstain. *(Maxim of manner: just too long; Maxim of quantity: too much information).*

#### Module 4

Module four is an upper-intermediate level where students are exposed to relatively advanced speaking, reading, writing and thinking skills. This is the highest compulsory level all students have to take before they can choose the elective Modules , 5 and 6.

A speech sample was recorded in the first semester of 2008 using 4 Namibians and one subject from Botswana. The students were selected from a range of ethnic/ language groups and were all the same age. There was a female student who was Otjiherero speaking, a female student who was Oshiwambo speaking, a female student who was Damara>Nama speaking, a male student who was from the Caprivi region and was Subiya speaking and the student from Botswana whose ethnic group was Kalanga.

Students were given a day to think about the topic: "The causes of crime in Namibia". Their interactions were recorded the next day. They were allowed to speak until they had exhausted any further responses they could draw from each other. After they had spoken their speech sample was transcribed as accurately as possible indicating lapses, pauses etc. A grid was used to indicate where they flouted the relevant Maxims.

**Student A:** Even if you steal diamonds you get more years....so if...in Namibia I just feel that life is not valued.....that's what you are having a lot of...ahh...er... especially when it comes to murder cases. And then they prolong the...you'll see someone who is waiting for trial for three years...and I just feel it loses value, you know the person is walking free on the street, but they committed such a big crime... and you know I think Namibia just have to change its whole judicial system. I feel capital punishment should just come back...people were afraid...in the past... *(Maxim of quantity and manner: here we see far too much information supplied by the speaker, and the ideas are also disjointed).*

**Student A:** Sometimes...I mean some people are happy to go to jail... I mean they've got three square meals a day...a bed to sleep on. You are comfortable... like Namibian jails they are very comfortable...er...er.somebody was saying that especially in the.....*(Maxim of quantity and manner: here we see far too much information supplied by the speaker, and the ideas are also disjointed).*



**Student B:** ...and everything...*(Maxim of relevance: this speaker continues from speaker A, but says nothing of meaning, thus also flouting the maxim).*

**Student A:** ....and they are very...they are well off. They do very well, they are well taken care of...so..*(Maxim of manner: too wordy and repetitive).*

**Student B:**...who'd wanna be there...*(Maxim of relevance: once again the Herero speaker makes a speech utterance but it is of no value).*

**Student A:** I mean 'cause I know of...of people who've come in and out of jail...if you ask them...they'll tell you "I mean I'm in jail..."*(Maxim of relevance: the speaker is continuing this train of thought from his first utterance but is not talking about the causes of crime as such – the speaker goes off on a tangent concerning jails and the judiciary system in Namibia. Maxim of quantity: far too much unwanted information is given).*

**Student C:** ...a regular thing to them...*(This is a sensible adjacency pair example as it is relevant to the previous utterance, but because the previous speaker is flouting the maxim of quantity, it is inevitable that this speaker follows in that vein).*

**Student D:** If you look at the unemployment rate you find that this days...the qualified people are on the streets.....*(Maxim of quality: This is a gross generalisation lacking evidence).*

**Student C:** ...so if you are not in the right mind you do a crime...you're under the influence you don't know what you are doing. *(Maxim of quality: the student does not really substantiate what she is trying to say).*

**Student A:** Ok...um...crime...what is...crime can mean anything...you know...crime is...you can look at crime from different perspectives...*(Maxim of quality: Here it would seem as if the student is simply "marking time" as she does not know what to say to contribute to the conversation).*

**Student E:** We can actually say that that is also a source of crime, 'cause that...most children like they finish their grade 12 and they haven't done anything...and they go around and entertain themselves by committing petty crime...*Maxim of quality: everything here is relevant but the reply flouts the maxim and since it is unrelated).*

**Student D:** I think I agree with my friend when she said...I think the government is already doing enough. *(Maxim of quality: the statement does not tell the truth, since it cannot be verified).*

**Student A:** You can't just come out of high school...and look for job, because people are looking for experience, they are looking for a qualification. Instead if you knew for example, or if you did...er...um...Home Economics, or baking and cooking or what...*(Maxim of manner clarity – avoid obscurity and ambiguity: here we see examples of odd run-on replies somehow making sense. The stream of conversation between the 5 subjects clearly flouts the maxim of manner).*

## Module 6

In this discussion all participants were students doing Module 6, which is an advanced English course. In Module 6 the emphasis is on oral communication skills. Students learn to conduct meetings as part of their course. The topic that was discussed was:

“Demolition of old houses to be renovated”. The participants had to role play Members of the City Council and Residents in order to engage in the discussion.

**Member of the City Council A:** I would like to invite questions from the residents on our decision. (*maxim of manner: “...on our decision” is ambiguous. It is not suitable at the beginning of a discussion. We do not know which decision?*)

**Resident A:** I am working near the place to be demolished. I want to ask you where you can place us.

**Member of the City Council:** To answer your question, I want to kindly inform you that we did all beyond our powers to find you temporary accommodation while renovation is taking place for 3 months. (*maxim of quality: “...we did all beyond our powers” lacks evidence*).

**Another member of the City Council:** I don't understand. Does she work in that place or where?

**Member of the City Council:** She lives in that street and she works nearby that street, which means she is employed in that surrounding. (*Maxim of quantity: information given is more than required*).

**Resident B:** It will cost me the time and money to come to work. My salary is low, I won't be able to pay the taxi every day as well as the place where you can place us. (*Maxim of quantity: information given is more than what is required*).

**Resident A:** The place, we don't know where to go. If you place us far from our work place and schools for our children, that will be a big problem. (*Maxim of manner: information is not quite clear. What is meant by “... big problem”?*)

**Member of the City Council:** Relocation, we give you ample time. (*Maxim of manner: there is ambiguity in “ample time”*).

**Resident B:** I am not feeling happy about this decision, because it will cost me time and money to come to work. And this renovation is going to take place for 3 months.

**Member of the City Council:** Unfortunately we didn't come up with something, and this implies that you as residents have find temporary places to stay while renovation is taking place, and that's all we could do beyond or powers. (*Maxim of manner: what is meant by “...beyond our powers”? It is ambiguous and lacks evidence as said earlier*).

**Resident A:** I am representing residents as a group, not as an individual. As residents we really welcome your idea of renovating our place. But we have a problem, the place, we don't know. We don't know where to go up to now. But the idea is good. (*Maxim of quantity: irrelevant information added to what is needed, e.g. "I am representing residents as a group, not as an individual"*).

**Member of the City Council:** I want to clarify that question on relocation. We give you ample time. We've done our part.

## Module 2

### Analysis of speech patterns in an online discussion

It was decided that Module 2 students would be subjected to an online discussion in order to compare how they perform online vis a vis face to face discussions. Further, students in Module 2, unlike Module 1, are used to online learning having been introduced to it at Module 1 itself. Module 2 students do a pre-intermediate English, having some components of Module 1 and some to Module 3. It is a transition between Module 1 and 3 and in a sense a preparation for Module 3.

After reading a text on using animals for testing medicine and chemicals (writefix.com), students were given a trigger question for the online discussion: "Many new drugs need to be tested on animals. Should we use animal testing for medicine, cosmetics, chemicals and food products?"

The subjects were Namibians from two different language groups: Oshiwambo (the majority), and Otjiherero. There was no difference between the two language groups in flouting the maxims. Below are examples on how Grice's maxims were flouted. There is an overlap in some instances as more than one maxim was flouted at the same time. The maxim(s) flouted are indicated in brackets.

**Question:** "Many new drugs need to be tested on animals. Should we use animal testing for medicine, cosmetics, chemicals and food products?"

**Student A:** To me testing of animals should be used due to the fact that they are the only ones that have same character as humans. (*Maxim of manner: the information provided is ambiguous*).

**Student B:** Yes, we can use animal test for medicine. (*Maxim of quantity: the information provided is too little*).

**Student C:** Yes, new drugs should be tested on animals. This is because there is no other creature on earth where these new drugs can be tested on. We can't use human beings in these experiments because the effect will take longer to show because of the life expectancy, they live longer than animals. (*Maxims of quantity and manner: information provided is more than what is required, and is ambiguous, e.g. "... the effect will take longer to show"*).

**Student D:** Dear, are you sure of what you are saying? (*Maxims of quantity, relation and manner: information is too little, not pertinent to the discussion and ambiguous*).

**Student B:** Why are we not using humans for test? (*Maxim of quantity: information provided is too little*).

**Student E:** Yes, we must use animals for testing medicine, cosmetics, and food due to various reasons. First, if the medicine is dangerous it will just kill animals, not us humans. (*Maxims of quantity and manner: information is insufficient/too little and not clearly stated*)

**Student D:** So you mean that animals can also behave like human beings? (*Maxim of quantity: too little information is provided*).

**Student F:** No, I don't think we should use animals to test medicine, chemicals and food products, because the results may show that the product is safe but it can be dangerous to humans. (*Maxims of quality and manner: information lacks evidence and is ambiguous*).

**Student B:** Yes I am. And you are asking that there is something wrong with my answer? If yes, tell me what it is. (*Maxim of relation: the student is out of topic; the information provided is irrelevant for the discussion*).

**Student C:** And why not on young people? (*Maxim of quantity: information given is too little*)

**Student G:** I against animals testing for medicine because they experience too much pain and die by going through this process. We as humans can solve our problems by subjecting our self to this kind of testing, like we can do testing using those who are sick with certain diseases. (*Maxim of quantity: information provided is more than what is required, e.g. "... we as humans can solve our problems..."*)

**Student D:** Do animals use cosmetics? (*Maxim of relation: the student is out of topic, the question is irrelevant*).

**Student E:** Humans are more important than animals, just imagine if we are having many animals than human. What will the world be? So, it is best for animals with same character as humans to be used, example monkeys. (*Maxims of quantity and relation: the student has given more information than required, and some of that information is irrelevant*).

**Student A:** Animal testing is cheap. On the other hand animals are large. Animals are easily bred, and maintained safely in controlled labs. The costs of testing in humans would be extremely high and this will not be the waste of capital or loss of life. We know even that you can get the animals with the same character but you cannot get the human as she/he is. (*Maxims of quantity, relation and manner: information given is more than what is required and some is irrelevant, e.g. "... animals are large", and "...animals are easily bred and maintained". Part of the information given is also ambiguous, e.g. "... you can get animals with the same character but you cannot get the human as she/he is."*)

**Student C:** Because human beings live longer than animals the effect or results will take longer to show in human beings. Secondly it is because people are more

important than animals, you can buy animals for example but you can't buy a person. (*Maxim of quality: information lacks evidence, e.g. "... but you can't buy a person."*)

**Student H:** Animal testing can be dangerous to animal nature, but on the other hand, it prevents human beings and their nature. I am suggesting on these positively in favour of animal testing rather than human beings testing, because if this was being done on human beings, it would be much expensive than on animal testing. (*Maxim of manner: ambiguous statements given, e.g. "... it prevents human beings and their nature" and "...I am suggesting on these positively"*).

**Student B:** Yes, I agree with you by saying that medicine and other cosmetics because they may not be harmful to animals but they are harmful to humans. (*Maxim of manner: the whole statement is not clear at all*).

### Findings

By analyzing the speech patterns in the face-to-face discussion above, it can be noted that the maxims were generally less flouted at advanced level as compared to the online discussion and at lower levels. There was no single violation of the maxim of relation in Module 6 and the maxim of quality was only violated once. However, it is interesting to note that just as in the online discussions at the lower intermediate level, the maxims of quantity and manner were flouted more than others. The method used in determining where flouting of Maxims took place was, as has already been stated, a grid(check appendix). The following is a representation of maxims that were flouted in the various modules:

ENGLISH LEVEL	MAXIM OF MANNER	MAXIM OF QUANTITY	MAXIM OF RELEVANCE	MAXIM OF QUALITY
Module 1	11	4	5	1
Module 2	8	10	5	2
Module 3	8	4	1	3
Module 4	4	4	3	5
Module 6	4	3	0	1

In many of these instances of a flouting of a certain maxim there was an overlap with another maxim, i.e., speakers flouted two maxims at the same time

For Module 1 the maxims of manner [9] and relevance [4] were mostly flouted. Maybe at this level, students still find it difficult to process and utilise their new vocabulary to express themselves clearly in lesser number of words. This will account for the flouting of the maxim of relevance. The students were very eager to incorporate

new skills. For example, in the following sentence: "Corporal Punishment must be banned at school cause as my colleague who is standing here by my side has said already **how can you force a horse to drink water?** So I see corporal punishment as being banned at school." This is evidence of using idioms and phrases which they did not clearly understand as well as the use of which did not enhance the meaning of the statements. The student had tried to incorporate the idiom to enhance his view on the topic. Unfortunately the student could not integrate the idiom correctly. Maybe their focus is in incorporating new learning material into their utterances. The maxim of quantity was flouted two times. The maxim of quality was only flouted once.

For Module 3 the maxims of manner [8] and quality [3] were mostly flouted. Students still struggled to create short, clear, precise utterances. It appears as if that the use of more words equalled a better transference of meaning. The students appeared to be more confident in their language usage. They did not hesitate to change facts or create unclaimed statements to bring their views across to the listener. As the maxims stand, there were overlaps, as regards the length of what one says, between the maxims of quantity and manner; these overlaps can be explained (partially if not entirely) by thinking of the maxim of quantity (artificial, though this approach may be) in terms of units of information. In other words, if the listener needs, let us say, five units of information from the speaker, but gets less, or more than the expected number, then the speaker is breaking the maxim of quantity. However, if the speaker gives the five required units of information, but is either too curt or long-winded in conveying them to the listener, then the maxim of manner is broken. The dividing line however, may be rather thin or unclear, and there are times when we may say that both the maxims of quantity and quality are broken by the same factors.

**Online discussions:** One is never sure for whom a certain response was specifically meant, because students did not use names to show to whom they were responding when they posted their replies in online discussions. More replies could be posted at the same time, and the person analyzing the speech patterns was not able to put the whole discussion in any logical order. The analysis of the speech patterns in the online discussions above indicates how the maxims are flouted in different ways.

The maxims of **quantity** and **manner** were flouted to a large extent, in **10** and **8** instances respectively, while the maxims of **quality** and **relation** were the least violated. The maxim of **quality** was only flouted **twice**, while the maxim of **relation** was only flouted **3 times**. However, in two instances the maxim of **relation** was flouted by the same student (Student D) who did not really contribute to the discussion as he kept asking irrelevant questions. It should also be noted that in many instances the maxim of quantity was violated by providing insufficient or too little information, not by giving more information than what is required. This could be due to language barriers or inability/fear of students to express themselves in English.

## **Conclusion**

As the proficiency level of students in lower English courses is generally poor compared to students in high level courses, it has an impact on the quality of their output, in other words, in the flouting of the maxims in this regard. It is interesting to note that all students, irrespective of their English proficiency mostly flout the maxim of manner. Therefore we can conclude that all students struggle to create clear, brief and coherent sentences. This explains why students are observed to be verbose. In the lower level, the transfer from L1 to L2 limits the students a bit. Students are inclined to give too little information. However, in the higher levels students struggle to summarise their thoughts to create sentences that are more precise.

The main reasons why certain maxims are flouted more than others seem to be the following:

- 1) Students have varying degrees of grammatical competence. This affects the way they speak.
- 2) More confident students are less aware of turn-taking conventions and speak without giving others the necessary space to formulate sensible replies.
- 3) The less confident students speak less and keep quiet when the confident ones interrupt. They also do not formulate replies effectively.
- 4) Those who flout the maxim of **manner** more than other maxims seem to be students with a relatively poor command of English. They are wordy and struggle to formulate their thoughts. This could be due to L1 interference.
- 5) When the maxim of **quality** was flouted, students did not have anything sensible to add to the conversation. This seems to occur where students have a higher level of English speaking competence. They have enough to add to a conversation but sometimes what they say is irrelevant. This could be because the speech exchanges are more fluid and rapid and speakers do not formulate their thoughts sufficiently before replying. Weaker students (Module 1 and 2) first have to think and structure their replies, resulting in more sensible replies to previous exchanges even if the replies were grammatically poorer.
- 6) Students who flout the maxim of **quantity** more than others seem to do so because they want to "impress" other speakers with their knowledge and speaking ability. This maxim is flouted by students from all the modules. Poor and strong speakers flout this maxim.
- 7) The maxim of **relation (relevance)** was flouted by students from all modules. There seems to be no link between grammatical competence and the flouting of this maxim. There seems to be a link between the reasons for flouting the maxim of quality and the flouting of the maxim of relevance. Students who add too much information will probably also add irrelevant information.

Pragmatic analysis as undertaken above yields very useful insights into the teaching and learning of English at the Polytechnic. This kind of analysis can help in pedagogy and enable lecturers to focus on the real needs of our students and thus improve teaching and learning. Further, an analysis of disjointed talk patterns by other researchers could be constructive in understanding speech patterns.

## References

- Austin, J. (1962) *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cutting, J. (2000). *Analysing the Language of Discourse Communities*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Grice, H.P. (1975). "Logic and Conversation in P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds) *Pragmatics (Syntax and Semantics)* Vol. 9. New York: Academic Press.
- Grundy, P. (2000) *Doing Pragmatics*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. Harlow: Longman.
- Schiffin, D. (1994). *Approaches to Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell Press.
- Sperber, D, and Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Trask, R. L. (1999). *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Yule, B. (1996) *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- <http://writefix.com/argument/essaylist.htm>



Copyright of Nawa: Journal of Language & Communication is the property of Department of Communication, Polytechnic of Namibia and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.