



Flouting Grice's Conversational Maxims: A Case Study of the 2022 Kenyan Deputy Presidential Debate

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ABSTRACT

Political debates are important ventures that have been carried out globally. They show how well candidates can think on their feet, manage stress effectively and what facts they have at their fingertips. Significantly, debates thrust candidates to public examination, prompting them to explain their agenda, defend themselves against the criticism of opponents and explain why they should be elected. Presidential debates have become the norm the world over and many countries in Africa have given such debates prominence especially during political campaigns. With the advent of technology, televised debates have been embraced and media houses in conjunction with other organizations have been in the forefront in organizing such debates in order to give the public a chance to evaluate the preparedness of their candidates for the tasks they are yet to undertake if elected in the positions they are vying for. Television allows attachment between a presidential candidate and the public and it furnishes voters with more factors with which to evaluate candidates. In Kenya, these broadcast debates have become a fundamental part of egalitarian exchange, shaping how citizens judge dependability, management style and preparedness to rule. This study sought to investigate instances in which Grice's conversational maxims were flouted by two Kenyan deputy presidential candidates during a televised debate that took place in the run up to the 2022 general elections. The study was guided by Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. A qualitative descriptive design was used and excerpts from the debate were purposively selected for analysis. The study revealed that both candidates flouted Grice's conversational maxims.

Key words: Pragmatics, Gricean maxim, political discourse, conversational implicature

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Khaemba (2024) opines that political discourses are social practices tied to specific historical contexts. Wodak et al., (as cited in Khaemba, 2024) contend that utterances are only significant if we consider their use in a specific scenario; if we understand the underlying conventions and rules; if we recognize that they are embedded in a certain culture and ideology, and if we know what the discourse related to in the past. Discourses that are political in nature take varied forms; they could be in the form of speeches or even debates. Political debates which are pivotal in elections in countries the world over take different formats and are held at different times in the election cycle.

According to CPD (2020), the benefits of debates are numerous for instance, they can assist voters make more informed choices at the ballot box as was reported by citizens in Malawi who noted that after the first ever 2014 presidential debate, elections that year were more substantive and focused on issues that directly impacted their lives. Debates also provide a useful side-by-side comparison of candidates and motivate the electorate to take part in the voting process. This benefit is corroborated by a media analyst in El Salvador who reported that one of the first presidential debates carried out in 2019 "...marked a milestone in the country's nascent democracy...due to the clash of ideas and the presentation of the candidates to millions of compatriots in and outside of the country."

Additionally, debates help promote peace and reconciliation in tense election environments. This was echoed by an African debate participant in a presidential debate that took place in Liberia. He stated, “The greatest thing about this debate is to see Liberian presidential candidates sitting here and talking to each other and trying to convince voters rather than being in the bush and shooting at each other.” Debates can provide an opportunity for candidates to publicly commit to peaceful elections. This includes agreeing to accept election results or using legal channels to resolve election disputes as occurred in Ghana, Kenya and other nations rather than calling supporters to the streets (CPD, 2020). According to Legal Assistance Centre (2015), public debates allow voters to see how candidates perform when they are not simply reading from a prepared script, including assessing how they respond to challenging questions. Debates show how well candidates can think on their feet, how they cope under pressure and what facts they have at their fingertips. Significantly, they thrust candidates to public examination, prompting them to explain their platforms, defend themselves against the criticism of opponents and give reasons why they should be elected.

In Africa just like in the West, presidential debates have gained momentum and Ghana has been a leader in this venture. The Ghanaian debates have been credited with promoting issues-based voting, increasing the accountability of elected leaders, reducing political tensions, and contributing to peaceful elections. The participating candidates hold hands at the end of the debate and pledge to uphold peace before, during and after the elections, with video clips of this peace pledge being replayed to promote peaceful elections as a healthy contest of ideas (Legal Assistance Centre, 2015).

Despite the fact that Kenyan presidential debates have been given prominence in many linguistic researches, limited attention has been given to the Kenyan deputy presidential debates since searches done using different search engines such as Google Scholar and Research Gate among others have not yielded adequate literature, an indication that there is need for more research in this area. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study sought to analyze instances where the deputy presidential candidates flouted Grice’s maxims during the 2022 Kenyan Deputy Presidential Debate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study on The Power of Words from the 2024 United States Presidential Debates: A Natural Language Processing Approach conducted by Jiménez-Preciado et al, (2024) analyzed the linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies employed in the 2024 U.S. presidential debates from the exchanges between Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and Kamala Harris. It revealed distinct linguistic profiles for each candidate: Trump consistently employed emotionally charged language with high sentiment volatility, while Biden and Harris demonstrated more measured approaches with higher lexical diversity. This study is instrumental to the current since it aids in the comprehension of political discourse in high-stakes debates while also bringing to perspective the communication approaches that can be used by presidential candidates and their running mates while engaging the electorate. This study is however different from the current in a number of ways for example, while it dealt with debates by presidential candidates in the United States of America, the current is interested in the debate conducted by deputy presidential candidates in Kenya.

Employing a qualitative approach, Rakhmasari (2023) conducted a study which examined how maxims were flouted in the Second American Presidential Debate by Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. The study revealed that both speakers flouted Grice Maxims with that of quantity being the most flouted. The study gave several reasons why the presidential candidates flouted the maxims for instance, to convince voters, assure them and cover a candidate’s weaknesses. This study is instrumental to the present because it provides information on Grice conversational maxims, the theoretical framework pivotal for the current study’s data analysis. It however differs from the present in the sense that while it was interested in how American presidential candidates flouted Grice’s maxims during their presidential debate, the current is interested in how Kenyan deputy presidential candidates flouted Grice’s maxims during their deputy presidential debate.

Utilizing Grice’s (1975) conversational maxims which make up the cooperative principle, Al-Shboul (2022) carried out qualitative research on Flouting of Grice’s maxims by Jordanian speakers in everyday communication. Data was collected from seven Jordanians (four males and three females) of varied ages ranging from 25 to 36-year-old and who speak Jordanian Arabic. The conversations that were tape recorded were naturally occurring in domestic settings where the respondents usually interact. Guided by Paul Grice’s (1975)

Cooperative Principle theory, the researcher classified these occurrences into groups based on which maxim (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) is being flouted and what pragmatic function the flouting performs. The results revealed that Jordanian speakers flout the maxim of quantity, quality, relation, or manner for different purposes using different pragmatic strategies including sarcasm, exaggeration and topic-shifting. By flouting a maxim, the speaker directs the hearer's attention to an implicature that he/she makes, in an indirect way, assuming that the hearer is able to capture this implicature, based on the shared background between them. The study thus argued that flouting is positive and can be classified as a positive politeness strategy. That is, interlocutors neglect a maxim to maintain and strengthen social intimacy. Flouting is thus positive in the sense that it minimizes the social distance between Jordanian speakers and it mitigates the negative face threatening that might arise in a conversation. This study also maintains that the speaker's flouting of maxims constitutes an important factor in helping the addressee realize the speaker's intended meaning. This study is instrumental to the current in the sense that it provided information on flouting of Grice's maxim as well as on the analytical tool that was used in data analysis. It however differs from the current in the sense that while it examined how Jordanian speakers flouted Gricean maxims in everyday conversations and the roles that these flouting plays, the current is interested in how Kenyan deputy presidential candidates flouted maxims during a televised debate that was conducted in the run up to the 2022 general elections.

Using a qualitative descriptive research design, Buddharat, Ambele and Boonsuk (2017) analyzed the different ways and forms by which politicians (during political debates) violate the Cooperative Principle (CP) in their communication. This study specifically examined the 2016 US presidential debate. The transcription data was analyzed within the features of conversation implicature. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted. The finding revealed that maxims in political debates can be violated in a number of ways, categorized as, opting out of a maxim, maxim of clash, flouting of maxims and violation of maxims. The study further revealed that the obvious way in which the politician's responses generate implicature is by flouting the maxims, especially that of quantity, quality and relevance. This study is instrumental to the current in the sense that it provides adequate literature on the Cooperative principle, the analytical tool in which the present study is grounded. The point of divergence between this previous study and the present however is that while it broadly examined the ways in which maxims were violated in the 2016 US presidential debate, the current investigated the flouting of such maxims in a Kenyan deputy presidential debate that took place in 2022.

In a study that was interested in the functions performed by candidates in the presidential debates and the topics on which these functions occurred, Gyasi and Sarfo-Kantankah (2021) opine that presidential debates have become a constant practice in the electioneering process of most countries. The study revealed that the debates enable the audience to assess the candidates based on the latter's policies and reactions to some thought-provoking questions concerning the economy and the welfare of a country. The study further noted that the presidential candidates acclaimed more than they attacked and defended moreover, two additional functional categories were identified. This study informs the current on political discourse as well the functions that the candidates perform during such debates. In addition, it informs the current with regard to data analysis methodology. It however, differs from the current which was interested in the deputy presidential candidates' debate that was conducted in Kenya towards the 2022 general elections. Another point of divergence is that while this study used the Benoit's Functional theory in data analysis the current employed the Dialectical-Relational Approach by Fairclough. Additionally, while this previous study examined the roles performed by candidates during presidential debates, the current is interested in the instances in which Gricean maxims were flouted during the debate held for deputy presidential candidates in Kenya in 2022.

Anchored on Michel Foucault's Political discourse and critical approaches and Norman Fairclough's Critical discourse approaches, Khaemba (2024) carried out a study on the power of words in political discourses of the general election campaigns in Kenya. This study employed the descriptive design and it utilized qualitative and discursive resources. It demonstrates that Kenyans do not vote independently; rather, they are persuaded to vote through the power exerted by the rhetoric of the politicians and the professional media practices that assist their presentation. This study is instrumental to the current since it provides adequate literature on political discourse. It also informs the current study with regard to Critical Discourse Analysis theory by Fairclough which is one of the analytical tools employed in analyzing data in the current study. The geographical contexts are also similar with both studies conducted in Kenya. The point of divergence however between this previous and the current study is that while it focused on the use of words in political discourses of the general election campaigns, the

present is interested in how two deputy presidential candidates flouted conversational maxims in a debate that was held for them towards the 2022 general elections.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed the theory of Conversational Maxims by Paul H. Grice (1975).

Grice's Conversational Maxims

Grice's conversational maxims were introduced by Paul H. Grice. In his 1975 publication, Grice opines that the four conversational maxims (quality, quantity, relevance and manner) are normally observed by participants in their conversations. In his 1975 book *Logic and Conversation*, Grice defines how people communicate by stating that:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did.

They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction (Grice, 1975, p.47).

The four main maxims which serve as principles that rule successful communication according to Grice (1975, p.45-47) are as follows:

1. Maxim of Quantity

- a. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. Maxim of Quality

- a. Try to make your contribution one that is true.
- b. Do not say what you believe to be false.
- c. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. Maxim of Relation

This maxim requires one to be relevant.

4. Maxim of Manner

- a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
- b. Avoid ambiguity.
- c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- d. Be orderly.

According to Grice (1975), when these maxims are adhered to, communication takes place successfully however, Al-Shboul (2022) contends that successful communication in many languages and dialects is not necessarily secured by this criterion. For instance, Yaqin and Shanmugana (as cited in Al-Shboul, 2022) found that maxim's non-observance secures clarity among the speakers of Sask dialects. Simons (as cited in Al-Shboul, 2022) opines that the non-adherence to the Gricean conversational maxims demonstrates that they (maxims) are not necessarily universal since cultural background, language and topic play a significant role in communication.

A speaker who does not follow the conversational maxims is said to be flouting them; consequently, conversational implicature is produced by the speaker. Grundy (2000) believes that whenever a maxim is flouted there must be an implicature to save the utterance from simply appearing to be a contribution to a faulty conversation: hence flouting a maxim is a salient way of getting an addressee to draw an inference thereby recovering an implicature. Flouting the maxims is also divided into four namely:

Flouting Maxim of Quality

According to Cutting (2002), speakers who flout the maxim of Quality say an utterance that doesn't represent what they mean, think and the truth condition. Speakers say something which is completely untrue or for which he/she lacks adequate evidence (Thomas, 2013). People also flout the maxim of Quality by making exaggerated or untrue statements. For example, if someone says, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," this is not meant to be taken literally, but the speaker is emphasizing how hungry he/she is. The study examined how the deputy presidential candidates may have flouted the maxim of Quality to express support or loyalty to their presidential principals or dramatize national issues.

Flouting Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of Quantity is flouted when a speaker gives more or less information than the situation requires (Thomas, 2013). By flouting this maxim, speakers can convey more than just content; they can signal something about their social or emotional investment in the interaction. Levinson (1983) argued that in some situations, flouting can be a way to signal politeness. The study investigated how candidates provided too much or too little information to defend or elevate their presidential running mates, downplay their opponent's or minimize politically risky details about national issues.

Flouting Maxim of Relation or Relevance

According to Thomas (1995) maxim of Relevance is flouted when conversation is done peripheral from the topic. The speaker gives information or a response which is obviously irrelevant to the topic. Cutting (2002) opines that speakers who flout this maxim look forward to the hearer discovering the unsaid utterance and creating a link between their utterance and the next one.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Cutting (2002) posits that in flouting the maxim of Manner the speaker is ambiguous and obscure in his or her utterance. According to Jary and Kissine (2014), by flouting the Maxim of Manner, speakers create room for implicature and indirect communication, which allows for nuanced expressions of discomfort, politeness, or strategic evasion. This research investigated whether the deputy candidates employed vagueness or ambiguous language to protect the image of their principals, evade direct confrontation with their opponents or present sensitive national matters in a palatable or indirect way.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The data were verbal discourses produced by two deputy presidential candidates during a televised debate at the Catholic University of East Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. This debate was singled out because it provided an important platform for the examination and analysis of candidates' language with the intention of revealing the approaches they employed to structure their communication and address political issues affecting the electorate. Ten debate excerpts in which candidates engaged in question-and-answer sessions on major national issues were identified using purposive sampling. Systematic sampling was then employed to select particular statements within each excerpt in an organized and consistent manner, ensuring a balanced representation of the debate. Live video recording of the debate was downloaded from YouTube, the primary research instrument which was used in data collection. It offered the researcher an opportunity to examine the candidates' arguments as well as their facial expressions, gestures and tone. Additionally, YouTube provides an accessible and rich medium for capturing both verbal and nonverbal aspects of the debate (Rickie, 2010). After downloading the spoken content, it was transcribed into text. The transcription was done manually for the purposes of ensuring accuracy.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing instances where the deputy presidential candidates flouted Grice's maxims during the 2022 Kenyan Deputy Presidential Debate.

This is one of the excerpts from the deputy presidential debate that was held between two candidates namely: Rigathi Gachagua and Martha Karua. Rigathi Gachagua who is Candidate A is the deputy presidential candidate

for Kenya Kwanza political party and the running mate of William Samoei Ruto while Martha Karua who is Candidate B is the deputy presidential candidate for Azimio political party and the running mate of Raila Amolo Odinga. The broader thematic concern in this excerpt was the candidates' sources of wealth. In this particular instance, the main issue being addressed was the freezing of some accounts that belonged to Candidate A.

Theme 1: Source of Candidate A's Money That Had Been Frozen

Candidate A

Extract 1

MODERATOR: Mr. Gachagua you have a national audience. What is the source of the money that was frozen because that is the context.

CANDIDATE A: *Aah, I have said many times that I am a victim of blackmail by president Uhuru Kenyatta whom I served as a personal assistant. President Uhuru Kenyatta wanted me to abandon Willam Ruto and join him in fighting my presidential candidate and I said No! Because he did not give a good reason. He blackmailed me, sent me Nancy Gitawe's advisors to threaten me, that if I don't abandon William Ruto and join him, I'll face his music from the state and... (Honourable Gachagua) one problem started after another, they froze my accounts, KRA froze all my companies then they arrested me on trumped up charges for one and a half years, no evidence in court, nothing. I'm a victim of blackmail and persecution by Uhuru Kenyatta using the state criminal justice system to manage politics and deal with those who do not agree with them.*

Candidate A's response to the question about the source of the frozen funds demonstrates deliberate flouting of several Gricean maxims to shift the debate from a narrow financial query to a broader narrative of loyalty, persecution, and political resilience.

Flouting Maxim of Quantity.

Rather than simply naming the source of the money, he provides an extended narrative detailing threats, blackmail, account freeze, and arrests: *"Aah, I have said many times that I am a victim of blackmail by president Uhuru Kenyatta... sent me Nancy Gitawe's advisors to threaten me... they froze my accounts, KRA froze all my companies then they arrested me on trumped up charges for one and a half years, no evidence in court, nothing."* Each added detail amplifies the narrative of victimhood, creating the impression of a sustained, systematic attack. By giving more information than required, Candidate A seeks to justify his position and elicit sympathy, reinforcing the impression of being unfairly targeted while positioning himself as principled and steadfast. The statement conveys the idea that the question about money is secondary; the primary concern is the misuse of state power for political ends. This extensive elaboration is not gratuitous but serves the rhetorical purpose of enveloping the narrow financial question within a broader moral and political argument, inviting the audience to empathize with him as someone being unfairly targeted rather than scrutinized for personal gain. This flouting allows him to defend his character and strengthen his alliance with his principal, while diverting attention from the direct question about the origin of funds. Moreover, the candidate flouts this maxim to sway some voters to vote for his political party this he does by playing the victim in order to appeal to the emotions of his audience.

Flouting Maxim of Quality.

The Maxim of Quality is flouted in Candidate A's categorical claims regarding President Kenyatta's motives and actions, which cannot be independently verified: *"President Uhuru Kenyatta wanted me to abandon William Ruto and join him... he blackmailed me..."* The speaker hints that these actions are part of a deliberate attempt to undermine him, portraying the state as a tool of political coercion. By presenting these unverifiable claims confidently, Candidate A seeks to assert moral authority and justify his unwavering political loyalty. The aim is to construct a compelling narrative of victimhood that simultaneously deflects scrutiny from the question about frozen money.

Flouting Maxim of Relevance

The Maxim of Relevance is similarly flouted when Candidate A moves from the specifics of frozen money to a broader accusation of political persecution: *"I'm a victim of blackmail and persecution by Uhuru Kenyatta using*

the state criminal justice system to manage politics and deal with those who do not agree with them.” Rather than answering the narrow question about the origin of funds, he reinterprets the issue as a story of political loyalty and personal suffering. The implicature is elusive but clear: the audience is invited to conclude that the money’s freezing is irrelevant to its legality; what matters is that his alignment with William Ruto has made him a victim of political coercion. In this sense, Candidate A transforms a potentially compromising question into an opportunity to communicate integrity and devotion to his political ally. This move reframes the discussion from a technical financial explanation to a moral and political narrative, casting himself as a victim of injustice and indirectly questioning the ethical conduct of his opponent’s affiliates. The strategic purpose is to reroute the debate from a potentially damaging financial detail to an argument highlighting his courage and loyalty.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Candidate A also flouts the Maxim of Manner through emotionally charged, dramatic language: *“he blackmailed me... sent me Nancy Gitawe’s advisors to threaten me... then they arrested me on trumped up charges...”* The phrasing is vivid and evocative, yet it sacrifices concise clarity about the money itself. Also, the account is fragmented, and contains interruptions and unfinished clauses, which would normally reduce clarity. Yet, pragmatically, this lack of order functions to reinforce the narrative of ongoing turmoil and unpredictability imposed by external forces. It invites the audience to conclude that the complexity and chaos of his situation cannot be reduced to a simple explanation; it is too entangled with the political conspiracies of powerful figures. The disorderly delivery enhances his persona as someone under siege yet resilient, which resonates with an audience attentive to issues of political justice and loyalty.

Overall, Candidate A does not merely evade a difficult question; he redirects attention, constructs a narrative of political victimhood, underscores loyalty to his principal, and morally positions himself in contrast to the perceived misuse of state power. The strategy invites the audience to interpret the frozen accounts not as evidence of wrongdoing, but as collateral damage in a struggle against political coercion. This is a simple example of how flouting Gricean maxims can be harnessed in political discourse: it produces implicatures that serve multiple rhetorical goals concurrently shaping perception, evoking empathy, and reinforcing political allegiance, while carefully managing the constraints of a public debate.

Candidate B

Extract 1

MODERATOR: Martha Karua, what is your take on this matter?

CANDIDATE B: *I was really hoping that my colleague would explain to us how an individual finds five billion shillings in their accounts but I hope one day Kenyans will be able to know money that was transferred to his accounts in the last 10 years of Jubilee administration, but that is him to account. I believe as leaders we have to be a com... accountable that is why there is declaration of wealth so that as you enter office people can know how much you’re worth and as you exit or in the middle they can monitor and see how you are progressing whether it is from your own salary and if it’s from business it has to be business that can be ascertained. I think we really need to come clean because if you cannot account for your wealth, you cannot be a good steward of the money of the people.*

Flouting Maxim of Quantity

Candidate B’s response deliberately flouts the Gricean maxims to turn the debate from a direct inquiry about Candidate A’s finances to a broader discussion on accountability, governance norms, and moral leadership. Instead of providing a straightforward answer, she remarks: *“I was really hoping that my colleague would explain to us how an individual finds five billion shillings in their accounts but I hope one day Kenyans will be able to know money that was transferred to his accounts in the last 10 years of Jubilee administration, but that is him to account.”* By extending beyond a simple acknowledgment, she communicates that Candidate A’s financial dealings are opaque and morally questionable. The flouting of Quantity allows her to introduce a narrative of institutional oversight and the historical context of wealth accumulation, gesturing that the question is not merely about isolated funds but about broader patterns of financial propriety. This positions her as a custodian of

accountability, shifting the burden of explanation onto her opponent while framing herself as principled and attentive to systemic integrity.

Flouting Maxim of Quality

The Maxim of Quality is flouted through the assertion of claims that cannot be immediately verified in the debate: the reference to money transferred to Candidate A's accounts during the last ten years of the Jubilee administration implies factual knowledge that she does not fully present. This suggests that there is a pattern of financial irregularity, positioning her argument as morally authoritative even in the absence of concrete proof. This allows her to challenge her opponent's ethical standing while remaining within plausible deniability, reinforcing her role as an advocate for principled governance.

Flouting Maxim of Relevance

Her response also flouts the Maxim of Relevance. She moves from the narrow scope of Candidate A's frozen money to a discussion on governance practices: *"I believe as leaders we have to be accountable... that is why there is declaration of wealth... as you enter office people can know how much you're worth and as you exit or in the middle they can monitor."* The effect of this response is to convey that ethical leadership is inseparable from transparent financial practices, suggesting that Candidate A's personal financial issues are indicative of a broader ethical concern. By reframing the question around institutional accountability, she extends the debate from a personal financial matter to the candidate's suitability for leadership. She flouts relevance to elevate the accusation from a personal matter to a national concern, thereby encouraging the audience to judge the opponent through an ethical lens rather than a technical one. This swings attention away from direct accusation while still casting doubt on Candidate A, reinforcing her stance as a defender of good governance.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Candidate B flouts the Maxim of Manner through deliberate vagueness and open-ended phrasing: *"I hope one day Kenyans will be able to know..."* and *"we really need to come clean because if you cannot account for your wealth, you cannot be a good steward of the money of the people."* The audience is led to infer that there is knowledge or evidence that exists but is currently inaccessible, which encourages the audience to deduce wrongdoing without her explicitly stating it. This technique maintains legal and rhetorical safety while provoking critical reflection among the electorate. The lack of precise detail creates space for audience interpretation, planting concern about transparency while maintaining her own credibility.

Candidate B's flouting of Quantity, Relevance, Manner, and Quality functions to transform a narrowly focused financial question into a discussion of ethical standards, institutional oversight, and leadership integrity. Each flout serves a clear strategic purpose: to place scrutiny on Candidate A, highlight her own commitment to accountability, and encourage the audience to evaluate moral fitness rather than just transactional details. Through these rhetorical manoeuvres, she positions herself as a principled, judicious candidate capable of holding others accountable without directly engaging in personal attacks.

While the issue of frozen assets highlighted procedural transparency, discussion of net worth shifted the focus to personal financial ethics and public perception, linking individual accountability to broader notions of trust and integrity.

Theme 2: Net Worth.

Candidate B

Extract 2

MODERATOR: This is a question to both of you. You have brought up the subject of wealth declaration, what is your worth Honourable Karua?

CANDIDATE B: *Aaah, I think just about 150 million and that is because the 56 million I had declared in 2013 has appreciated because of inflation. I haven't had new properties but I'm a person many may not understand I'm not thirsty for land, I'm not thirsty for worldly goods. I'm happy to have a house I call home. I am happy to*

have a house in my father's land. I do not look for property not everybody is hungry to amass. I'm hungry to do something to help my country, to transform lives of the people (moderator: Right). So, if you're looking for Martha Karua to be a billionaire no! I'm not hungry for billions

Flouting Maxim of Quantity.

When Candidate B states her net worth “*just about 150 million*” she immediately contextualizes it with reference to her previously declared wealth and inflation: “*the 56 million I had declared in 2013 has appreciated because of inflation.*” By doing so, she flouts the Maxim of Quantity, providing far more information than a simple number would require. This is not mere elaboration; it implicitly constructs a narrative of transparency and ethical consistency. The audience is invited to interpret her as a politician whose financial integrity is visible and verifiable, in contrast to opponents whose wealth might be opaque or contentious. The detailed explanation serves to pre-empt suspicion, framing her modest wealth as a reflection of principled restraint rather than ambition, and elevating her credibility within the debate.

Flouting Maxim of Quality

Candidate B flouts the Maxim of Quality when she frames her wealth as “*just about 150 million*” and preceding the statement with “*I think.*” While she provides concrete numbers, the hedging indicates awareness of uncertainty and the limits of precise knowledge, which in a political context is crucial. The implicature is that she is being honest and cautious, not overstating or exaggerating her assets, which strengthens her credibility. At the same time, it communicates prudence and measured judgment traits desirable in leadership by showing she does not claim infallible knowledge even about her own finances. This flout mitigates risk: she avoids the perception of boasting or providing potentially challengeable figures, thereby reducing opportunities for opponents to attack her honesty or integrity. Moreover, it positions her as a reflective, trustworthy figure, reinforcing her overarching rhetorical frame that leadership is about ethical conduct and service rather than personal wealth.

Flouting Maxim of Relevance

She further flouts the Maxim of Relevance by moving the discussion from precise figures to values and intentions: “*I'm not thirsty for land, I'm not thirsty for worldly goods... I'm hungry to do something to help my country, to transform lives of the people.*” Through this explanation she conveys that true leadership is measured by service and civic responsibility, and ethical commitment rather than material accumulation. The communicative intent is to turn the evaluative lens from wealth to character, implicitly questioning the motivations of wealthier politicians without a direct attack. This flout allows her to occupy the moral high ground, framing the conversation around integrity, dedication, and public service; qualities that resonate deeply in a politically aware electorate. When she says that she is hungry to do something to transform the lives of the people she appeals to the audience albeit indirectly to vote for her political outfit. She further builds solidarity with the audience so that they see her not just as one of them but as one who is interested in their general wellbeing. In her, the audience will feel safe. This flouting is also a positive politeness strategy that the candidate employs to take care of the audience's faces thus fostering harmonious coexistence.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Her rhetorical style flouts the Maxim of Manner in a deliberate way. The repeated parallel structures “*not thirsty for land... not thirsty for worldly goods... not hungry for billions*” create a rhythm that emphasizes her restraint and measured approach. This deliberate pacing signals careful reflection, encourages the audience to pause and absorb the meaning, and communicates a persona of moderation and self-discipline. It is an effective strategy for constructing an image of ethical leadership: the style of delivery reinforces the substance of her message.

Candidate A

Extract 2

MODERATOR: Honourable Gachagua how much are you (*Gachagua Interrupts*) worth?

CANDIDATE A: *My account did not receive 5 billion that is propaganda (audience laughs). I have 200 million that is the money that is held, 200 million. 64 million I worked in the ministry of lands and settlement, 10 million. I worked in Kenya Power, 33 million I worked with the ministry of livestock, another 46 million I worked in another organization called PATEK up to 200 million that is all the money but when you send policemen to investigate, they do not understand accounts. When you save money in a fixed deposit account it leaves your personal account into a suspense. A normal policeman looking at it, movement in and out four times a year of 200 million: he thinks you have 800 million within that year so when he multiplies by seven years, he says you have 12.4 billion. That is the folly of the kind of investigations we are having in this country. I don't have billions I have 200, 203 million into that account and that is part of my wealth, I have more 800 million minus the 200 they are holding another 600.*

Candidate A's response to his net worth question is more than an accounting exercise; it is a carefully orchestrated performance of expertise, credibility, and control. He flouts all four Gricean maxims to strategically shape audience perception.

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

Candidate A goes far beyond the requested simple figure, providing a detailed enumeration of income sources: *"64 million I worked in the ministry of lands... 10 million I worked in Kenya Power... 33 million... another 46 million... up to 200 million."* This deliberate overproduction serves multiple layers of purpose. First, it signals transparency by accounting for every source, he pre-empts claims of secrecy or impropriety. Second, the sheer volume of information creates cognitive saturation, making the audience less likely to question specific numbers and more likely to accept the overall narrative. Third, this approach establishes procedural competence, portraying him as methodical, meticulous, and capable of managing complex systems. By overwhelming the surface-level question with detail, he reframes the debate from wealth assessment to evaluation of competence and integrity, anchoring audience trust in his narrative from the outset. Provision of information that is unnecessary helps the candidate conceal his weaknesses however, a keen listener would judge him as one who is untruthful because some of the information he gives does not add up. Candidate B also employs pragmatic strategies such as exaggeration in order to show solidarity with the audience and appeal to their emotions. This he intentionally does to portray the government of the day in a bad light and dissuade the audience not to vote for his opponent whom he refers to as 'a project' of the incumbent.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

Candidate A introduces technical financial explanations that cannot be independently verified within the debate: *"...When you save money in a fixed deposit account it leaves your personal account into a suspense... a normal policeman... multiplies by seven years, he says you have 12.4 billion."* These flouting projects epistemic authority, marking him as the only credible interpreter of his wealth. By presenting unverifiable but plausible technical details, he casts doubt on external claims without open confrontation, letting the audience infer that critics are misinformed or unqualified. The precision in the description also indicates understanding of complex systems, conveying competence and reinforcing the perception that he is disciplined, rational, and unfairly scrutinized.

Flouting the Maxim of Relevance

Candidate A strategically shifts the topic from personal wealth to the misinterpretation of financial data by investigators hence flouting the maxim of relevance. He says: *"...A normal policeman looking at it, movement in and out four times a year of 200 million: he thinks you have 800 million within that year so when he multiplies by seven years, he says you have 12.4 billion."* This departure from strict relevance produces the implied argument that accusations are systemic rather than personal. By emphasizing investigative error, he transforms a personal question into a commentary on institutional inadequacies, positioning himself as both a victim of misunderstanding and a critic of flawed oversight. It also guides the audience to evaluate the problem as procedural, not moral, encouraging interpretations that attribute inflated wealth claims to error rather than corruption. The flout serves a dual function: protecting personal reputation while simultaneously casting doubt on the credibility of authorities and the public narrative.

Flouting the Maxim of Manner

Candidate A flouts this maxim by providing information that is dense, multidimensional, and heavily mechanical: “... *When you save money in a fixed deposit account it leaves your personal account into a suspense... movement in and out four times a year of 200 million... he thinks you have 800 million within that year.*” By avoiding clarity and conciseness, he suggests that the issue is inherently complex and cannot be reduced to simple arithmetic or journalistic soundbites. This is a deliberate attempt to control the debate floor, limit opportunities for interruption and critique and avoid further questioning on the candidate’s worth. He does not seem comfortable with this topic and that could be the reason why he employs the pragmatic strategy of topic shifting to evade scrutiny. Flouting maxim of Manner modulates the cognitive effort required to process his response, tactfully asserting authority: only those willing to engage deeply can grasp the explanation. The style implies that superficial interpretations of his wealth are inadequate, reinforcing a persona of analytical rigor, and mastery over both content and discourse.

Having addressed personal wealth, the debate progressed to systemic issues. State capture offered a lens through which personal ethics and financial transparency intersected with broader governance and corruption challenges.

Theme 3: State Capture

Candidate A

Extract 3

MODERATOR: What is state capture?

CANDIDATE A: *State capture is where the people in power compete with the citizens for scarce resources. Where the people in power use their positions to advantage themselves to get business unfairly. Where people in power allocate resources to projects where they have an interest. I have an example in the year 20... (then takes out a piece of paper from his coat’s pocket then he opens it) I want to tell you what is state capture and conflict of interest. (reading the paper) this a gazette notice, legal number one, one, one, two dated 26th June, 2019. In the exercise of power conferred by section 106 of the stamped duty act the cabinet secretary of the national treasury and planning on the accommodation of the cabinet secretary for lands and planning directs that the instruments executed in respect of the transactions relating merger on any AIC...aah PLC and commercial bank of Africa shall be exempt from the provisions of the act (stops reading the notice) by a single signature. These two companies owned by the first family were exempted from paying 350 million. These are rich banks who have made money from domestic borrowing, they have lent money to the government, they are in Fuliza, the owners are the richest people in Kenya they were exempted from paying 350 million. Money that can put up 35 level three hospitals in Kenya. That is conflict of interest and state capture. That is chronic corruption is worse than corruption associated with public procurement, and that is what we must deal with, we must deal with state capture, we must deal with conflict of interest there is a railway line between Nairobi and Nanyuki that was put up at a cost of 3.8 billion, that railway serves one company that supplies fuel to Nanyuki...* (moderator interrupts)

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

Candidate A flouts this maxim by going beyond a brief definition to provide a detailed explanation of what state capture is thereby flouting this maxim. He enumerates the forms of state capture: resource diversion, favouritism in business, and allocation of public projects to private interests: “*Where the people in power use their position to advantage themselves... allocate resources to projects where they have an interest.*” By overproducing information, he conveys authority and analytical capability, showing the audience that corruption is systemic and interconnected, rather than isolated. He then provides a concrete case with financial specifics: “*...companies owned by the first family were exempted from paying 350 million.*” This level of detail quantifies the impact, anchors abstract concepts in real events, and conveys that he has insider understanding or knowledge of official records. The audience is invited to deduce that state capture has tangible consequences, reinforcing the seriousness of the issue. This suggests that he is capable of documenting and explaining complex institutional misconduct, enhancing his credibility as a commentator on governance.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

Candidate A flouts this maxim by referencing specific documents, legal notices, and monetary figures: “...*this a gazette notice, legal number one, one, one, two dated 26th June, 2019... companies owned by the first family were exempted from paying 350 million.*” These citations cannot be verified instantly by the audience, but they enhance his perceived credibility. This shows he has direct access to authoritative information and is speaking from knowledge rather than speculation. This flout is particularly effective because it blends factual density with narrative storytelling moving from law to financial consequence to social impact reinforcing the seriousness and legitimacy of his claims.

Flouting the Maxim of Relevance

Candidate A flouts this maxim by moving beyond definition to link systemic corruption with societal outcomes: “...*Money that can put up 35 level three hospitals in Kenya.*” “...*there is a railway line... that railway serves one company that supplies fuel to Nanyuki...*” These examples connect elite privilege to public deprivation, showing that state capture is not just a technical or legal problem, but one with social consequences. By choosing these examples, he frames the debate in terms of public loss, allowing the audience to evaluate corruption in functional and ethical terms rather than personal or partisan terms. The flout transfers attention from individuals to structural impact, encouraging the audience to consider institutional reforms and oversight. By mentioning how much the 350 million tax exempt could do for the ordinary citizens, the candidate tactfully appeals to the voters to elect them since they will ensure that the health sector, which has been neglected by successive governments, is revived so that citizens can get quality healthcare.

Flouting the Maxim of Manner

The explanation is rich and interspersed with methodological references, moving between abstract definition, legal documentation, financial figures, and infrastructure projects “...*this a gazette notice... companies owned by the first family were exempted from paying 350 million... railway line between Nairobi and Nanyuki... 3.8 billion...*” The complex delivery communicates that state capture is a compound issue, requiring careful reasoning. It also forces the audience to follow the argument actively, creating an impression that the topic is intricate and cannot be simplified. The information relayed is an indication that understanding corruption requires acuity and expertise, implicitly situating Candidate A as a knowledgeable and informed interpreter of institutional processes. Additionally, by structuring the explanation this way, he monopolizes the discursive space, steering the discussion from abstract definitions to concrete cases with measurable societal costs. Moreover, by providing detailed information the candidate presents himself and his principal as people concerned with the welfare of the citizens and who are ready to streamline the operations of the government so that wealth that is created does not benefit a select few but is used for the right purposes like improving infrastructure, healthcare and education among others. This flouting is thus used to sway the voting patterns in favour of this candidate’s political outfit.

Candidate B

Extract 3

MODERATOR: honourable Martha two minutes.

CANDIDATE B: *State capture is the repurposing of the state (Gachagua turns and looks at her) to serve an individual rather than public good and corruption cartels in this country, whoever they are, have strangled the country. I opened by saying Kenya can’t breathe, our health services (pauses) their money is taken, the money for agriculture for fertilizer subsidies, money for building dams such as Kimwarer, Aror, Galana Kulalu which was supposed to help Kenya feed herself. That is what state capture is about that every penny intended for the public a majority of it is ending up in people’s pockets. This is not about families or individuals it’s cartels and cartels are organized people, gangs of criminals because what they are doing is committing crime and you don’t need a commission to punish crime you just need serious law enforcement and if you find roadblocks that cases are taking too long then parliament can be used to do its work to consider proposals from the government to pass laws that fast-track such cases we all know that election petition cases take six months. Why can’t corruption cases similarly take such a period that is the debate that must go to the national assembly. Mr. Gachagua serves*

in the national assembly I have not heard him talk about corruption except when defending his own position in the cases he's involved in. In contrast, I am out of parliament but have been vocal whether is Kemsu whether it's any other corruption and have also been vocal in upholding the rule of law and reminded my brother president Kenyatta that he cannot serve beyond his term, a position he holds at this moment that he is going home.

Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

Candidate B flouts this maxim by offering extensive sectoral examples beyond a brief definition. She cites public health, agriculture, and infrastructure, explicitly quantifying potential losses: “...*money for building dams such as Kimwarer, Aror, Galana Kulalu which was supposed to help Kenya feed herself.*” This over-elaboration communicates that state capture has extensive societal effects. The audience is led to see the scale of corruption, instead of focusing solely on individuals. The detailed enumeration reinforces her credibility as informed and attentive to public welfare, while implicitly contrasting her engagement with that of her political opponent. Through this flouting, she builds solidarity with the citizens by mentioning how she has been performing her civic duty of pointing out the wrongs of the government and compelling those in authority to be responsible and exercise transparency. In this way, she appeals to voters to elect her political outfit because she is a defender not just of democracy but of the people. She assures the audience that in her principal's government people will be held accountable and no money will be embezzled in her watch.

Flouting Maxim of Quality

Candidate B references observable programs and sectors, grounding abstract claims in tangible public consequences: “...*health services... agriculture for fertilizer subsidies... dams such as Kimwerera, Aror, Galana Kulalu.*” While the precise outcomes may not be independently verified, the references indicate informed awareness of public policy and social impact, positioning her as a credible critic of systemic corruption. This flouting enhances persuasive power, showing that her critique is rooted in public interest rather than rhetorical flourish.

Flouting the Maxim of Relevance

Candidate B flouts this maxim by expanding the discussion from a definition to a critique of institutional inefficiency: “...*you don't need a commission to punish crime; you just need serious law enforcement... If you find roadblocks that cases are taking too long, then Parliament can be used to pass laws that fast-track such cases.*” Instead of simply explaining state capture, she connects corruption to governance gaps, showing that elite misconduct interacts with procedural bottlenecks. The audience concludes that addressing corruption requires systemic solutions, not just individual accountability. This flouting redirects the evaluative lens from personalities to institutional responsibilities, allowing her to position herself as a principled actor advocating structural reform.

Flouting the Maxim of Manner

Her delivery is intensely narrative and morally charged, layering examples of societal harm with critiques of political actors: “...*every penny intended for the public, a majority of it is ending up in people's pockets... organized people, gangs of criminals...*” Rather than using technical or linear presentation, Candidate B structures her argument around ethical consequences, combining social, political, and moral dimensions. She opines that state capture is morally reprehensible and socially damaging, prompting the audience to evaluate corruption in ethical terms. The layered narrative also draws contrasts with her opponent's behaviour, reinforcing her moral authority without direct personal attacks. This flouting brings out this candidate as a hands-on individual. She does not just expose the rot in the government but also brings to perspective solutions to some of the problems that she has pointed out. She also intelligently ropes in her opponent as party to the mess that the country finds itself in by failing to perform his role as a member of parliament. She therefore appeals to the audience to give her principal a chance to bring back the country to the right trajectory; additionally, she gives an assurance to her audience that corruption is a menace that can be dealt with provided there is goodwill especially from those in positions of power and that is what they intend to tackle if given a chance by the electorate.

CONCLUSION

Maxims are used to ensure that a conversation is done within the confines of a given communication process and it goes on smoothly however, in many instances, interactants flout them. In this study, the two deputy presidential candidates flouted the Maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevance and that of Manner. Flouting of these maxims were done for varied reasons for instance, to help the listeners comprehend the intended message, to deceive them so that they can endorse their preferred candidate, to convince them, to seek sympathy from them and to assure them of their candidate's support. This study therefore contends that failure to observe Gricean conversational maxims is a demonstration that maxims are not universal but culture specific and that language and the topic of discussion play a pivotal role in effective communication.

This study had several limitations for instance, it relied solely on the debate transcript, excluding non-verbal cues, audience reactions, and media framing. Additionally, it focused on only two candidates thus limiting generalizability, and lastly, it put emphasis on language and pragmatics without integrating other communication modes such as delivery or visual signalling. Future research could include audience reception to explore how different groups interpret pragmatic strategies, comparative analyses across political or cultural contexts, and multimodal approaches combining verbal, visual, and paralinguistic cues to capture a fuller picture of debate communication.

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