

Indirect Defamation in Iraqi Social Media: Analyzing Grice's Violated Maxims across Different User Types

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Abstract

In online discourse, users often avoid direct accusations by implying defamatory meanings through indirect language. Social media platforms, particularly in Iraq, provide a space where individuals navigate defamation through implicit strategies, often violating conversational norms. This qualitative study investigates indirect defamation in Iraqi social media through the lens of Grice's Conversational Implicature (1975). It hypothesizes that different Iraqi social media users engage in indirect defamation by violating Grice's maxims in distinct ways, with frequently violations of Quality and Manner maxims and that figures of speech, particularly exaggeration and sarcasm, play a key role in conveying implicit defamatory meanings. Data were collected from public posts and comments on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), focusing on four distinct user categories: public figures with real identities, public figures with fake identities, anonymous pages/admins, and private individuals with few followers. Findings reveal that the maxim of Quality is the most frequently violated across all samples, followed by Relevance, while Manner and Quantity appears to be less frequently violated. These violations are often accompanied by figures of speech, particularly sarcasm, exaggeration, metonymy, and euphemism, shaping implicit defamatory meanings. Notably, public figures using real identities tend to employ metonymy and euphemism, while those with fake identities or limited public exposure rely on sarcasm and exaggeration.

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التشهير غير المباشر في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي العراقية: دراسة في انتهاك مبادئ غرايس عبر أنماط مختلفة من المستخدمين

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المستخلص :

تُعَدُّ مَنَصَّاتُ التَّوَاصلِ الاجْتِمَاعِيِّ ساحةً مَفْتُوحَةً لَتَوْظِيفِ اسْتِراتيجِيَّاتِ ضَمْنِيَّةٍ لِلتَّشْهِيرِ، مِمَّا يَنْطَوِي عَلَى خَرَقِ الأَعْرَافِ الحِوَارِيَّةِ، إِذْ يَتَجَنَّبُ كَثِيرٌ مِنَ المَسْتخدِمِينَ تَوجِيهَ الاتِّهَامَاتِ بِشكْلِ مَبَاشِرٍ، فَيَلجَأُونَ إِلَى التَّعْبِيرِ عَنِ المَعَانِي التَّشْهِيرِيَّةِ بِأَسَالِيبِ غَيْرِ صَرِيحَةٍ. فَجَاءَتْ هَذِهِ الدِّرَاسَةُ النُّوعِيَّةُ هَادِفَةً إِلَى تَحْلِيلِ ظَاهِرَةِ التَّشْهِيرِ غَيْرِ المَبَاشِرِ فِي مَوَاقِعِ التَّوَاصلِ الاجْتِمَاعِيِّ العِرَاقِيَّةِ، مِنْ خِلَالِ تَوْظِيفِ نَظَرِيَّةِ "الاسْتِئْزَامِ الحِوَارِيِّ" لَغَرَايسِ (1975). وَتَنْطَلِقُ الدِّرَاسَةُ مِنْ فَرَضِيَّةٍ مَفَادَهَا أَنَّ فَنَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفَةً مِنَ المَسْتخدِمِينَ تَمَارَسُ التَّشْهِيرَ غَيْرَ المَبَاشِرِ بِطَرَائِقِ مُتَبَايِنَةٍ، مِنْ خِلَالِ انْتِهَاكِ مَبَادِي غَرَايسِ. كَمَا تُشِيرُ الدِّرَاسَةُ إِلَى دَوْرِ الأَسَالِيبِ البَلَاغِيَّةِ الحِوَارِيَّةِ فِي نَقْلِ الرِّسَالَةِ التَّشْهِيرِيَّةِ ضَمْنِيًّا. وَقَدْ جُمِعَتِ البَيَانَاتُ مِنْ مَنشُورَاتٍ وَتَعْلِيقَاتٍ عَامَةً عَلَى مَنصَاتِ فَيْسبُوكِ، وَإِنْستِغْرَامِ، وَإِكْسِ (تَوَيْتِرِ سَابِقًا)، لِأَرْبَعِ فَنَاتٍ مِنَ المَسْتخدِمِينَ: شَخْصِيَّاتٍ عَامَةٍ تُعْرَفُ بِهَيَوِيَّاتِهَا الحَقِيقِيَّةِ، وَشَخْصِيَّاتٍ عَامَةٍ تُسْتخدَمُ هَوِيَّاتٍ وَهْمِيَّةٍ، وَحَسَابَاتٍ وَصَفْحَاتٍ تُدَارُ مِنْ قِبَلِ مَجْهُولِينَ، وَأَشْخَاصٍ عَادِيَّينَ مَحْدُودِي الانْتِشَارِ. أَظْهَرَتِ النُّتَاجُ أَنَّ مَبْدَأَ "الجُودَةِ" هُوَ الأَكْثَرُ تَعَرُّضًا لِانْتِهَاكِ فِي العَيِّنَاتِ، يَلِيهِ مَبْدَأُ "العَلَاقَةِ"، فِي حِينِ كَانِ خَرَقَ مَبْدَأِي "الاسْلُوبِ وَالكَمِيَّةِ" أَقْلَ شَيُوعًا. وَغَالِبًا مَا ارْتَبَطَتِ هَذِهِ الانْتِهَاكَاتُ بِاسْتِخْدَامِ أسَالِيبِ بَلَاغِيَّةٍ كَالسَّخْرِيَّةِ وَالمَبَالِغَةِ وَالمَجَازِ وَالتَّلطِيفِ، وَهِيَ أَدْوَاتٌ أُسَاسِيَّةٌ فِي تَشكِيلِ الخُطَابِ التَّشْهِيرِيِّ غَيْرِ المَبَاشِرِ. وَظَهَرَ أَنَّ الشَّخْصِيَّاتِ العَامَةَ المَعْرُوفَةَ بِهَيَوِيَّاتِهَا تَمِيلُ إِلَى اسْتِخْدَامِ المَجَازِ وَالتَّلطِيفِ، فِي حِينِ يَعْتمَدُ أَصْحَابُ الحَسَابَاتِ المَزِيْفَةِ أَوْ المَسْتخدِمُونَ مَحْدُودِي الانْتِشَارِ عَلَى السَّخْرِيَّةِ وَالمَبَالِغَةِ بِشكْلِ أَكْبَرِ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التَّشْهِيرُ غَيْرِ المَبَاشِرِ، وَسَائِلُ التَّوَاصلِ الاجْتِمَاعِيِّ، مَبَادِي غَرَايسِ، الاسْتِئْزَامِ الحِوَارِيِّ، الأَسَالِيبِ البَلَاغِيَّةِ.

Introduction

In the context of social media, reputation is very important, and the implicit accusations can deeply affect someone's public image. Even if the statement may not be defamatory from a legal perspective, it can still harm someone's reputation by raising doubts about their integrity. Defamation, whether expressed through writing, speech, images, or other forms, is an offence that is often tied to malicious language.

The internet and social media have transformed communication by enabling public and private interactions across vast distances without face-to-face contact. This lack of immediacy often leads to more offensive or disrespectful discourse, as the norms on blogs, forums, LinkedIn, and Facebook weaken the social constraints of real-world interaction. Moreover, digital spaces encourage free expression without regard for grammatical or spelling conventions (Barbulet, 2013; Wibowo & Kuntjara, 2013).

As a result, social media encourages users to express their opinions more freely, which often leads to violations of conversational maxims. These violations can harm a target's reputation and prompt negative reactions from online communities, as third parties may misinterpret intentions. Even if the information is false, it can make people think the victim acted immorally, causing severe reputational damage (Dempsey, 2020).

Aim of the study

This research aims to investigate how different types of Iraqi social media users engage in indirect defamation by violating Grice's maxims. It seeks to identify which maxims are most frequently violated. Additionally, the research aims to explore the role of figures of speech, such as exaggeration and irony or sarcasm, in conveying indirect defamation across various user groups.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do Iraqi social media users employ conversational implicature in expressing defamation?
2. Which of Grice's maxims are most frequently violated in defamatory content among users on Iraqi social media?
3. What are the most recurrent figures of speech used to convey indirect defamation among different users across Iraqi social media platforms?

The Model for analyzing indirect defamation

This study applies Grice's 1975 concept of **Conversational Implicature** to analyze indirect defamation in Iraqi social media. It examines how users deliberately violate the maxims to generate implicatures that imply defamatory meanings without direct statements.

Defamation: Definitions and Types

Defamation is generally defined by Black's Law Dictionary as an intentional false communication, either published or publicly spoken, that injures another one's reputation or good name (Black, 1999).

Defamation primarily is concerned with the intention behind the alleged defamatory statement. Miller and Perry (2013) emphasize that such statements should be done with malicious intent, stating that defamation is "calculated to injure the reputation of another, by exposing him to hatred, contempt, or ridicule" (p. 2272).

According to Iraqi legal systems, defamation is considered a crime that violates an individual's dignity, social standing, emotions, and honor. It involves publicly accusing someone of committing a wrongful act. If the act is proven, the individual accused may face legal consequences or suffer a loss of reputation within his/her community. (Al-Durra, 2009; Naseef, 2010; Mousa, 2012).

Defamation can be categorized into two types: libel and slander. Libel refers to written defamation found in various formats, such as newspapers, magazines, books, electronic messages, or distributed memos. In contrast, slander involves spoken defamatory remarks, including speeches, sermons, or other public oral presentations (Shuy, 2010).

Defamation in the Digital Age: The Role of Social Media

Social media as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2015) as websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking (PAGE #) (Note: the quotation marks should be deleted, it is not a direct quotation). It includes various digital platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, that encompasses billions of people. These platforms allow users to express their ideas and opinions instantly, significantly affecting and changing how people interact and communicate.

According to Broadb and Search (2020) people spend nearly seven years of their lives on social media, while they spend less than two years interacting in the "offline" world. This frequent use of social media increases the opportunities to engage in online defamation, making it easy to write and share anything to the world with just a click on the mouse. Moreover, the anonymity option within online environment encourages individuals to write hurtful, exaggerated, or defamatory comments about others (Sakolciová, 2021).

Additionally, Zhang et al. (2023) introduces other reasons for why defamation phenomenon increases on social media, stating that committing defamation online is characterized by low cost, quick dissemination and difficult in obtaining evidence, compared to traditional forms of defamation.

Social media includes a diverse range of users involved in defamation, from well-known figures using real or fake identities to anonymous individuals or page admins. The ease of hiding one's identity varies across countries due to different legal and cultural norms, which is why many studies focus on anonymous users, who are seen as having the most freedom to defame others online.

Theoretical Framework

The Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975)

A significant foundation in modern pragmatics is the work of H.P. Grice, whose theories have remained influential across linguistic studies. His insights established the foundational concept that

conversations are structured and organized, and this perspective continues to guide pragmatic research (Szczepanski, 2014). Under normal circumstances, conversations can be seen as collaborative efforts built on mutual understanding and aimed at achieving a common goal. This idea is reflected in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which suggests that conversation participants typically attempt to be informative, honest, relevant, and clear. It is designed to address situations similar to the following example that is provided by Grice (1975):

A: Is there another pint of milk?

B: I'm going to the supermarket in five minutes.

The reader of the above conversation would easily understand that there is currently no milk available and that some will be bought from the supermarket shortly. Grice (1975) argues the process of production and interpretation of these implicatures are governed by the principle: "*Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged*". Grice's theory is based on the idea that there is a difference between what is said and what is meant. This implies that speakers can convey implicit meanings, and listeners can interpret the intended meanings from conversations.

To communicate effectively, each participant in a conversation must adhere to specific conversational rules. Based on this requirement, Grice developed the Cooperative Principle, a fundamental principle that determines how language should be used most efficiently and effectively to ensure rational communication (Chi, 2018). He then elaborated this principle in four sub-principles, called maxims, which serve as guidelines or suggestions for conversation.

Grice's four maxims are Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. They are defined as follows:

a- Quantity:

- 1- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)
- 2- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

b- Quality:

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

c- Relation: Be relevant.

d- Manner:

- 1- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- 2- Avoid ambiguity
- 3- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- 4- Be orderly

Participants in a conversation are generally expected to adhere to all principles for effective communication. However, there are instances where individuals may not observe the maxims, either deliberately or unintentionally, due to the specific goals of their interaction. In this way, conversational implicature is generated. Furthermore, the researcher will focus on the *violation of maxims* in defamation implicature. The primary reason for this is that people tend to use the term "*violate*" to generate implicature.

Conversational Implicature

The concept of conversational implicature is now a significant subject in the field of pragmatics. Conversational implicature is not simple, understanding it requires context to determine its meaning. Grice clarifies the concept of conversational implicature as a sequence of the speaker's thought process regarding the ideas he wants the listener to consider. In turn, the listener recognizes the speaker's intent and interprets the implicature based on the context of the conversation, such as their shared knowledge (Lalić, 2020).

Implicature fulfills various purposes, including facilitating communication, preserving social harmony, misleading without being dishonest, enhancing style, and improving verbal efficiency. Common examples of implicature can be found in figures of speech like metaphors and irony, as well as in ambiguous language and criticism with faint praise (Davis, 2024).

The phenomenon of conversational implicature occurs when a speaker breaks the rule of an effective conversation. namely, cooperative principles, requires speakers to adhere to four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner, to ensure meaningful communication. If a speaker adheres to these maxims, implicature does not occur. Conversely, if a speaker fails to meet the maxims, conversational implicature can emerge, but only within a specific context of the utterance (Thomas, 1995).

Methodology

Data Description and Collection

The collected data is sourced from three major social media platforms popular in Iraq: Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), where written texts (posts and comments) are commonly found. The data are public and available to everyone. Screenshots of posts and comments were taken for analysis after identifying relevant content, i.e. defamation.

Social media users were classified into four different types with regard to their identity and numbers of their followers. Each category comprises three samples, allowing for balanced representation across different types of users.

1. Public known figures with real names and significant number of followers
2. Public known figures with fake names or accounts but many followers.
3. Pages or anonymous admins (may be with or without a significant number of followers)
4. Private individuals with few followers and little recognition.

Research Approach and Analytical Model

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing Grice's (1975) theory of Conversational Implicature to examine how indirect defamation is conveyed rather than explicitly stated.

Some Significant Notes

1. It is important to note that figures with followers 10,000 and above are considered known and regarded as influencers, in contrast, those with fewer than 10,000 followers are categorized as "unknown". This distinction is based on feedback from social media users.
2. Crucial distinction to consider is the difference between those with fake accounts and those who are anonymous. The former can be identified by the use of proper nouns or personal names, or abnormal nouns that they create for their own but still refer to a singular person, besides, their profile lack clear image. The latter, on the other hand, are entirely unseen, as they usually administer a page which is, most of the time, managed by multiple individuals. However, both figures conceal their identities.
3. In certain cases, it becomes necessary to use the term "Target" or similar expressions to refer to specific individuals, to minimize potential risks associated with directly naming them.

Data Analysis

Dataset 1: Texts About Public known figures/ Real names

Sample 1.1

- **Background:**

- The target is an Iraqi university professor who is recently appointed as the dean of a specific college.
- X, a Dean of another collage was recently arrested for being engaged in sexual acts with female students on a sofa in his office. This detail has then led to the term “a couch” to become a symbolic reference to immoral behavior in Iraq.
- Coinciding with the appointment of the target as the Dean of the College, many social media users do not merely share the news through various platforms, but also express their opinions. One social media user called Dr. Safy (the speaker), known publicly with her real name and with a significant following, responds to one of the posts on X platform, stating:



“He’ll get on a couch and make them eat dirt”

Three maxims are violated in the statement above: the maxim of **Quality**, **Relevance** and **Manner**. By mocking the situation, the speaker violates the maxim of **Quality** using the term “قنفة” “a couch” as a **metonymy** to imply a sever accusation that the target will engage in immoral and inappropriate behavior. This implied accusation, moreover, is irrelevant to the original topic of the target’s appointment and his actual responsibilities as a dean, thus, violating the maxim of **Relevance**. Lastly, the statement “هسه يصعد قنفة ويفشلهم” “He’ll get on a couch and make them eat dirt” itself is not clear and could be confusing without understanding the symbolic meaning of “قنفة” “a couch” in this context, thereby, violates the maxim of **Manner**.

Violating these three maxims lead to a **Conversational Implicature** that with a specific context (as in the case of X), and through the symbolic use of “قنفة” “a couch”, the audience will infer the implied meaning that the target will be engaged in unethical acts of sexual misconduct.

Sample 1.2

- **Background:**

- Ali Al-Janoubi is an Iraqi poet who appeared in an interview on one of the Iraqi TV channels. During the interview, he referred to his beloved using masculine pronouns, a usage that is common and widely accepted in the Arabic language. However, this led to widespread rumors that he might be homosexual and attracted to men.
- Shortly after, a Facebook page reports that an Iraqi employee at Najaf Al-Ashraf Airport was saved from an attempted assault by male Pakistani workers. In response, a public figure with great number of followers, Omar Ali (the speaker), comments:



“The Syndrome of Poet Ali Al-Janoubi”

This comment violates three maxims to imply defamatory accusation indirectly: **Quality**, **Relevance** and **Manner**. The speaker introduces the term “متلازمة” “syndrome” as a **Euphemism** to convey a negative and abnormal image about Al-Janoubi, suggesting that he is gay. This severe accusation is introduced without any evidence and can be false, thus violates the maxim of **Quality**. In addition to that, the accusation doesn’t match the topic being discussed (the assault) and doesn’t add any value to the main subject. It is then violates the maxim of **Relevance**. Moreover, the speaker uses a vague language in his comment “متلازمة الشاعر علي الجنوبي” “The Syndrome of Poet Ali Al-Janoubi” which goes against the principle that communication should be clear. This lack of clarity leads to the violation of the maxim of **Manner**.

Due to these violations, a **Conversational Implicature** emerges, forcing the audience to infer the intended defamatory meaning that Al-Janoubi is being accused of being gay without explicitly stating it, relying on the spread rumors about Al-Janoubi sexuality.

Dataset 2: Texts About Public known figures/ Unreal names or Fake Accounts

Sample 2.1

- **Background:**

- The target is an Iraqi bank that has introduced a sweepstakes called “Zanagheen” in which the winner receives a car. In one instance of this sweepstakes, the daughter of X’s manager (another Iraqi bank) emerged as the winner.
- Regarding this incidence, a well-known blogger with a significant number of followers and operates under a fake account on X platform called Abo Drndesh Al-askaree (the speaker) states:



“Godness! Hard-earned cash never goes to aliens”

“The daughter of X’s manager wins a car as a prize from Y”

The speaker’s statement “فلوس الحلال ما تروح للغريب” “Hard-earned cash never goes to aliens” serves as **sarcastic** remark to convey an implicit accusation of favoritism. While the phrase “فلوس الحلال” “Hard-earned cash” refers to money earned fairly, the speaker makes use of it ironically to suggest the opposite that the daughter of X’s manager did not win the prize by chance or fairly but rather that the target manipulated the competition to benefit someone with connection. This indirect accusation leads the statement to violate the maxim of **Quality** as the speaker attacks the target without any evidence. It

moreover doesn't match the central topic of the sweepstakes or the fairness of the process, thus violates the maxim of **Relevance**.

These violations work together to create a **Conversational Implicature** in which the audience, through the statement “...تفوز بسيارة كجائزة من المصرف...” “The daughter of X's manager wins a car as a prize from Y” will infer the speaker's intended meaning to achieve a defamatory desire as he accuses the target of favoritism or corruption suggesting through a figurative language that the sweepstakes may be rigged and the win wasn't by chance but predetermined because of the winner's connections.

Sample 2.2

- **Background:**

- Safaa Subhi is an atheist journalist who once insulted the holy Quran by describing it as inappropriate content.
- The targets are two Iraqi figures who are officially in charge of the committee monitoring inappropriate content in Iraq.
- A public known figure with fake account named Ra'is msalfan (the speaker) replied to Subhi on Facebook, stating:



“The lowest of the low”

“Since the media guys X and Y are the ones on the low-quality content monitoring committee themselves, you're safe and untouchable.”

The speaker's statement violates both **Quality** and **Relevance** maxims. The statement “فسدك امين محد يوصلك” “you're safe and untouchable” though directed to the address Subhi, is used in an **exaggerated** tone to imply that the targets are neglectful or ineffective in their duties. Since no evidence is provided to support such a claim, the speaker thus violates the maxim of **Quality**. Moreover, instead of engaging in the main topic of how Subhi insults the holy Quran, the speaker shifts the focus to offend other individuals as he states: “مدام الاعلامي... مسؤولين لجنة متابعة المحتوى الهابط فسدك امين محد يوصلك” “Since the media guys X and Y are the ones on the low-quality content monitoring committee themselves, you're safe and untouchable.”, making the claim violates the maxim of **Relevance**.

These two violations give raise to a **Conversational Implicature** in which the audience, by relying on the context and the speaker's choice of words “مدام الاعلامي... مسؤولين متابعة المحتوى الهابط” “Since the media guys X and Y are the ones on the low-quality content monitoring committee themselves”, will be able to infer the implied message that the targets incapable of fulfilling their roles, neglecting significant cultural and religious values.

Dataset 3: Texts about Anonymous or Pages (hidden names)

Sample 3.1

- **Background:**

- Ghofran Hussein is a blogger on social media who once shared a video proudly speaking about the raising she received from her family, stating that she wishes such raising for everyone.
- A Facebook page then, named Klawchia (the speaker) with anonymous admin/s, republished Hussein's video with a comment, stating:



“People always show what bugs them”

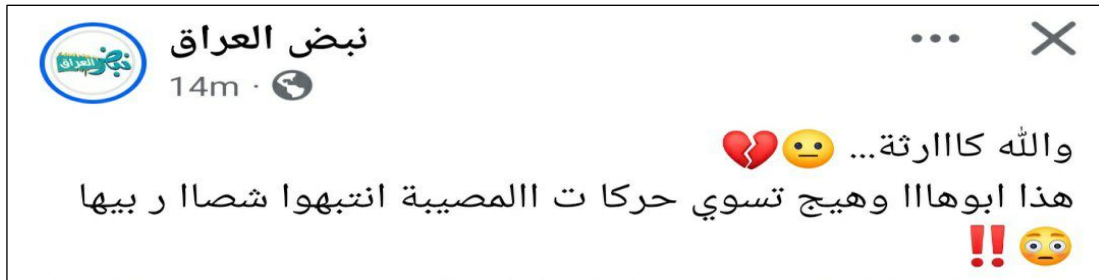
The speaker's statement “كل شخص يتحدث بالي ناقصه” “People always show what bugs them” violates two maxims. First it violates the maxim of **Relevance** as it is not related to the content of Hussein's video where she speaks positively about her upbringing. Instead, it is an indirect offence which implies that she praises her upbringing because she feels it's missing or inadequate. Such an accusation which is made with an **exaggerated** tone is unlikely to be true, thereby violates the maxim of **Quality**

These violations lead to a **Conversational Implicature** where the audience will interpret the intended defamatory meaning by connecting the speaker's comment to the context of Hussein's video, suggesting that she lacks upbringing.

Sample 3.2

- **Background:**

- In a spontaneous moment, a graduate girl had a photo session and shared it on social media, where her father hugged and kissed her out of paternal love and pride.
- Nabdh El-Iraq (the speaker), is a page on Facebook with anonymous admin/s republishes the girl's graduated photo session and states:



“Oh God! This is a mess! This is her dad, and this is how she acts! What on earth happened to her?”

The speaker's comment on the video violates three maxims to convey an implicit severe attack. The **exaggerated** tone in the expression “والله كالأرثه” “Oh God! This is a mess” followed by the statement “هذا ابوهاا وهيج تسوي حركات المصيبة انتبهوا شصار بيها” This is her dad, and this is how she acts! What on earth happened to her?” implies that the girl's behavior is inappropriate or immoral. However, the speaker doesn't specify which inappropriate movement or behavior she does, making the claim violates the maxim of **Quantity** for its lacking sufficient details.

This harsh claim, moreover, which is based on personal judgment is potentially to be false as it lacks factual evidence, therefore, violates the maxim of **Quality**. Additionally, the speaker violates the maxim of **Relevance** as they do not focus on the main topic of the video which is the graduation photo session; they instead suggest a shameful outcome.

These violations form a **Conversational Implicature** in which the audience, by relying on the content of the video, though showing affectionate interaction between a father and daughter, will be able to infer a negative interpretation of her actions.

Dataset 4: Texts about Normal individual with few followers

Sample 4.1

- **Background:**

- Amer Al-Kubaisi is a well-known Iraqi journalist and media personality. He worked as a television presenter and reporter, as he covered significant political and social events in the Arab world.
- AsiaCell and Zain are both Iraqi telecom companies.
- In a post on Facebook platform, Amer Al-Kubaisi addresses AsiaCell, expressing frustration due to an unauthorized subscription that reduced his mobile balance. He demands a refund and asked the company to stop activating automatic subscriptions without the customer's consent. Otherwise, he will report the matter to the Ministry of Communications and the parliamentary committee.
- In response to this post, an ordinary person, Abdullah Al Laheeby (the speaker) replies, stating:



“How much were you paid by Zain for this great and nice post?”

The speaker's comment violates the Maxims of **Relevance** and **Quality**. Instead of engaging with the main issue, which is Al-Kubaisi's complaint, the speaker divers the topic to a rhetorical question about potential payment from Zain “شكذ انطتك شركة زين” “How much were you paid by Zain”, thereby violating the maxim of **Relevance**. This rhetorical question carries a **sarcastic** tone “الرائع والجميل” “great and nice” where a serious accusation is implied, suggesting that Al-Kubaisi is being paid by Zain for his post, and that his complaint is not based on real issue but is part of a manipulation. Without evidence, such a claim is unlikely to be true, as a result violating the Maxim of **Quality**.

The violations of Relevance and Quality create a **Conversational Implicature**, leading the audience to infer an implicit accusation that Al-Kubaisi's complaint is likely not sincere and that he may be accepting a bribe to create such a post.

Sample 4.2

- **Background:**

- Fatima Qaidar is a young Iraqi media personality and television presenter known for her signature phrase, “عمري” “My life”, which she frequently uses in her shows. This phrase has become a unique feature of her and an important part of her public image. Recently, Qaidar has gained prominence across various social media platforms, including TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.

- In one of her street interview videos shared on Instagram, Qaidar was talking with a young man about married life. During the conversation, she used her signature phrase “عمري” “My life” while addressing him.
- In response to this, an Instagram private user named gsg_h_1234 (the speaker), left a comment, stating:



“purity oozes from her when she calls a stranger ‘Oh my life’ ”

The speaker’s comment violates two maxims of conversation: **Quality** and **Relevance**. The phrase “الشرف ينكط” “purity oozes from her” is an indirect accusation that is **sarcastically** employed to convey the opposite, suggesting that Qaidar lacks honor. This offensive judgment about her character is made without any evidence to support it, therefore violates the maxim of **Quality**. It is also irrelevant to the ongoing conversation which is about married life, thereby violates the maxim of **Relevance**.

By violating these two maxims, the speaker’s comment gives rise to a **Conversational Implicature**. This implication relies on both the cultural and social connotations of the term “عمري” “Oh, my life” and the phrase “تكول الرجال غريب” when she calls a stranger” where Using this term in public could be perceived as breaking the traditional norms of communication, especially when directed toward a man.

As a result, the audience will be able to interpret the meaning beyond what is explicitly stated suggesting that Qaidar’s behavior is dishonorable and violates social norms.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the analysis show significant insights of Conversational Implicature used by different types of social media users in Iraq. They reveal consistent violations of Grice’s maxims across all four databases and their corresponding samples. In Database 1, featuring public known figures with real names and a significant number of followers, the maxim of **Quality**, **Relevance** and **Manner** are violated in both samples, implying a deliberate use of ambiguity. These violations are associated with different figures of speech. Specifically, **metonymy** is employed in samples 1.1 while sample 1.2 features **Euphemism**.

In Database 2, where public figures with fake identities but significant followings are focused, a marked shift in the pattern of violations is exhibited, where only **Quality** and **Relevance** are violated in both samples. But sample 2.1 utilizes **sarcasm**, while 2.2 incorporates **exaggeration**.

Turning to Database 3, which includes pages and anonymous administrators, the findings reveal that the maxim of **Quality** and **Relevance** are once again violated in both samples with the violations of **Quantity** maxim in 3.2 as it results from a lack of information. Additionally, these two samples show **exaggeration** through their violations of the conversational maxims.

Finally, Database 4 with its private individuals with limited recognition and followers mirrors previous databases patterns by violating both **Quality** and **Relevance** maxims in both samples, with **sarcasm** employed in both cases.

The results show a consistent violation of the maxim of Quality across all samples, which can be attributed to the reason that when evidence is presented and accusations proven to be true, then such

accusations will not be classified as defamation in the first place. Similarly, not all attacks on social media qualify as defamation, as it is difficult to decide whether someone guilty or breaking social norms if they openly take pride in their actions.

However, the prominence taken by the violation of the maxim of Quality is closely followed by the maxim of Relevance, underlining its significant role in shaping implicature. The Maxim of Manner ranks next, occurring twice, while the Maxim of Quantity appears only once.

Szczepanski (2014) found that sarcastic comments consistently violated the quality maxim, which leads Ayunon (2018) to conclude that sarcasm and the quality maxim are closely related. However, he later discovered that sarcasm found in the violation of the quality, quantity, and relevance maxims (Ayunon, 2018). Aligning with Ayunon's (2018) findings, the current research shows that sarcasm is linked to Quality and Relevance maxims only as in samples 2.1, 4.1 and 4.2, but never found in the violations of Quantity and Manner maxims.

Nevertheless, this study reveals that sarcasm is not the only rhetorical device associated with maxims' violations. Other figures of speech, such as exaggeration, metonymy and euphemism also play a crucial role in the way these violations manifest in different samples.

While Grice (1975, 1978) considered figures of speech as instances of conversational implicature, Bach and Harnish (1979) argue that they represent entirely different pragmatic phenomena. However, this study supports Grice's perspective, as the majority of the data use figurative speech to violate the cooperative principles, which is consistent with Grice's treatment of conversational implicature.

The findings also reveal that even though the focus is on a particular person or individuals, the implications also extend to or affect other parties in some samples that contain defamatory statements. Samples 2.1 and 3.2 demonstrate this, as the defamatory content extends beyond the intended target.

Conclusion

1. In response to the first research question, the findings reveal that different Iraqi social media users employ conversational implicature when engaging in indirect defamation by violating Grice's maxims in distinct ways. While all databases consistently violate the **Quality** and **Relevance** maxims, other variations emerge, such as Database 1 also violating the maxim of **Manner** and Sample 3.2 incorporating a violation of **Quantity**. Despite this overall pattern, the key distinction lies in how these violations are expressed through different figures of speech. Database 1 employs **metonymy** and **euphemism**, exclusively utilizes **exaggeration**, whereas Database 4 features **sarcasm** as its primary rhetorical device.

2. As for the second research question, the findings indicate that the maxim of **Quality** is the most frequently violated among users across all datasets, reflecting a common pattern of conveying false or unverified information in defamatory content. This is followed by violations of the **Relevance** maxim, where users often introduce unrelated information to imply negative meanings. In contrast, the maxims of **Manner** and **Quantity** appear to be less frequently violated.

3. In relation to the third research question, the findings show that **exaggeration** and **sarcasm** are the most recurrent figures of speech used to convey indirect defamation across different user groups and platforms. While **metonymy** and **euphemism** appear in Database 1, the repeated presence of exaggeration and sarcasm in multiple datasets highlights their dominant role in shaping conversational implicatures associated with defamatory content.

Based on the observations and findings, the differences in the use of rhetorical devices among these user groups can be attributed to their level of public exposure, accountability, and persuasive intent. Public figures using real identities choose careful language to avoid backlash, while those with fake identities or less public exposure use stronger, more exaggerated tactics. This shows that defamation is not just about

violating conversational maxims, but also about carefully shaping language to fit different levels of risk and influence.

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