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**Pragmforensic Analysis of Selected Courtroom Testimonies and
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Pragmforensic Analysis of Selected Courtroom Testimonies and Evidence

 Awe, Israel Babatunde

Department of English Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko,

Ondo State, Nigeria

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5833-3399>

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Abstract

Purpose: This study critically investigates the relationship between pragmatics and forensic linguistics by analyzing some courtroom evidence and testimony. Pragmforensics is an analytical model that investigates how pragmatic elements, such as implicature, speech acts, presupposition, and the cooperative principle, shape legal discourse and influence meaning and interpretation.

Methodology: The study data were derived from criminal trials at the Ondo State High Court, Akure. The research examines the identified pragmatic elements with discernible implications for how courtroom participants interpret utterances using a quantitative case study approach.

Findings: The analysis reveals that strategic language choices and pragmatic elements are used for serious communicative purposes, such as creating meaning, obscuring responsibility, or subtly projecting points, rather than merely serving as art for art's sake. Furthermore, the study highlights how pragmatic resources can be deployed to interpret evidence and testimony. These findings are situated within a pragmforensic framework.

Unique Contributions to Theory, Practice, and Policy: This research is a major contribution to forensic linguistics, offering a pragmatic model for systematically evaluating the hidden meaning of courtroom evidence, particularly in a multilingual judicial environment such as Nigeria. This study is a significant contribution to forensic linguistics by proposing a structured pragmatic model for analyzing implicit meaning in courtroom discourse. This study shows that a pragmforensic approach to meaning evaluation offers an important perspective on the dynamics of courtroom interaction. In conclusion, the study advocates for greater understanding of the dynamics of language use in courtroom interactions, especially in a multilingual setting like Nigeria.

Keywords: *Pragmforensic, Legal Discourse, Forensic Linguistics, Pragmatic Features, Courtroom Interaction.*

Introduction

The current pragmaforensic study is a model proposed as an extension of the scope of the existing forensic linguistic analysis, which is a significant advancement in how meanings are systematically evaluated within judicial contexts using pragmatic resources. By critically examining how pragmatic features contribute to meaning and evaluation of evidence in legal discourse, this study expands the scope of the existing body of research that has investigated how language influences courtroom interaction and judicial interpretation (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Cotterill, 2003). Formal features and direct interpretation of the language of the law have formerly been the major focus of traditional approaches to legal linguistics (Tiersma, 1999). Sometimes, these approaches fail to consider the role of contextual elements and pragmatic features, including nonverbal cues, in determining the meaning of utterances.

In these modern times, there is a heavy reliance on forensic evidence in legal proceedings. Before now, forensic analysis had focused primarily on the empirical validity and accuracy of courtroom evidence, paying little attention to how language resources, pragmatic context, and other features, such as presupposition, implicature, deixis, and speech acts, impact meaning and the interpretation of evidence and testimonies in courtrooms (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Tiersma, 1999). This is a critical gap that needs to be explored to further advance the frontiers of knowledge of legal and courtroom language, as research findings have revealed that conscious language choices, including linguistic hedging, indirectness, and presupposition, can be employed or deployed to twist meaning, escape taking responsibility, and impact perceptions of situations and interpretations of issues among legal practitioners (Cotterill, 2003; Heffer, 2005). Further to the foregoing, given Nigeria's multilingual courtroom settings, it is indubitable that mere linguistic analysis may not yield real-time, adequate interpretations, which may lead to gaps in the evidence presented and cause possible misjudgments (Gibbons & Turell, 2008).

Unuabonah & Kupolati (2023) have delved into this area of linguistic research, using a mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative approach to analyze the use of key pragmatic elements in legal discourse. Kalejaiye & Oyagiri (2025) also analyze courtroom discourse using discourse markers to answer their research questions. However, the lack of a methodical, pragmatic forensic framework for attempting a courtroom evidence analysis might have affected the depth of the evaluation. Hence, there is a need for a well-grounded analytical model that incorporates both linguistic elements and non-verbal and contextual cues into its analysis.

Consequently, this study addressed this gap by critically evaluating how certain pragmatic elements function in courtroom interactions to unravel hidden meaning that may be significant in the determination of the case.

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To categorize and analyze the pragmatic features identified in the courtroom evidence and testimony.
2. To examine how the identified pragmatic features (such as speech acts, implicature, cooperative principle, presupposition, etc.) contribute to the perception and interpretation of courtroom evidence and testimony.

The general focus of this study is to look at the complex relationship between language and law and, specifically, how the county's legal system and the administration of justice can be shaped by language. In a narrower sense, the study critically examines how courtroom interactions are presented and analyzed, showing how language contributes to legal outcomes. It goes further to show that what is true and factual in the courtroom does not exclusively depend on concrete evidence or exhibits but on conscious or inadvertent linguistic choices, which can convict or acquit litigants or pervert or uphold the course of justice.

Literature Review

This study proposes pragmaforensic analysis, an analytical model that deploys the resources of both pragmatics and forensic linguistics to technically analyze and interpret how language can be manipulated to construct meaning, with particular attention to its legal implications in courtroom discourse. It focuses on how pragmatic features such as speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and cooperative principles function as linguistic resources for presenting evidence and shaping judicial interpretation (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). Forensic linguistics has been studied with a focus on the use and implications of language generally in legal contexts. However, pragmaforensic analysis expands this scope by explicitly emphasizing the *legal implications of pragmatic features* and treating them as potential pieces of evidence significant in legal discourse. On the other hand, discourse analysis in law within the forensic linguistics framework examines how language is used, its structure, and its interaction in legal discourse without placing much emphasis on the weight of the evidence and the legal implications of the linguistic element (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Cotterill, 2003; Conley et al., 2019). Therefore, pragmaforensic analysis functions, in a broader sense, as a link between valid, evidence-based inferences drawn from pragmatic features of legal discourse and legal issues such as culpability, innocence, credibility, and other judicial decisions.

Pragmaforensic analysis examines both explicit and implied meanings in legal language, revealed through linguistic and non-linguistic features with legal implications during courtroom interaction or in legal documents.

Pragmaforensic analysis recognizes that courtroom interactions are not just language analysis for academic exercise but also for legal and communicative reasons (Conley et al., 2019). In this regard, pragmatic theory has, therefore, provided a clearer and more explicit prism from which an in-depth evaluation of courtroom evidence and testimony can be carried out (Gibbons & Turell,

2008). This multidisciplinary approach responds to the fact that the interpretation and implications of legal language go beyond surface-level analysis, as they involve implicit meanings that depend on context (Ndumia & Ireri, 2022; Sogunro et al., 2024; Ajenifari et al., 2025).

This new interdisciplinary concept pays close attention to how available language resources are deployed to either conceal or reveal meanings within legal settings. Forensic linguistic approaches to language in legal contexts might focus mainly on linguistic/textual features such as speech patterns, structure, and word choices. Pragmforensic analysis of courtroom testimonies, however, is a rigorous investigation of the communicative essence or value of utterances that perform different speech acts and exhibit pragmatic features. This argument supports the argument that legal, or specifically courtroom, discourse is not just discussion or conversation but a complex social interaction in which legal matters are technically argued and meaning is conveyed or interpreted (Volokh, 2025). During interpersonal interaction in a legal context, both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication have some potential to make valid meaning. In fact, because words carry very significant implications, especially in law, courtroom participants must use them with absolute care.

The traditional approach to legal linguistic analysis has not given as much attention to how context and pragmatics, including nonverbal cues, shape the meaning of utterances. Pragmforensic analysis addresses this gap by exploring how courtroom language analysis is influenced by context, pragmatics, and inferences (Cotterill, 2003). The traditional argument is further reinforced by Conley et al. (2019) in their view that linguistic analysis of legal language focuses mainly on the surface and explicit meanings of grammatical structures and lexical choices in isolation, while pragmforensic analysis focuses on how linguistic elements and context (pragmatics) interact to create or reveal meaning that influences decision-making in a legal setting. In the same vein, Sogunro et al., (2024) argue that linguistic analysis of legal language focuses mainly on the surface and explicit meanings of grammatical structures and lexical choices in isolation. These special considerations in pragmatic inquiry are, therefore, important, especially given the intricate nature of courtroom interactions, where the pragmatic features of language use are significant in determining case outcomes. With this perspective, legal language is seen as a tool for arguing, providing, supporting, and influencing evidence (Cutting, 2005; Durant & Leung, 2016).

In forensic linguistics, witness statements can be viewed as pragmatic performances. The way language is used and analyzed pragmatically can reveal more than what words mean in ordinary consideration. One distinctive aspect of courtroom interactions is their use of highly ritualized and formal features (Gibbons & Turell, 2008). Discourse analyses of courtroom interactions reveal formal settings and ritualized language use (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007), a setting that creates and maintains authority and decorum. However, this formality and ritualized language are connected with pragmatic features through which facts not explicitly stated are revealed (Gaines, 2018). These features indirectly carry certain linguistic implications, which can definitely affect meaning and interpretation (Heffer, 2005; Volokh, 2025).

These distinctions between linguistic and pragmatic analyses create a kind of formality paradox. Pragmforensic analysis resolves this paradox as it examines how analysis of the pragmatic resources of language can help resolve arguments (Durant & Leung, 2016).

In summary, pragmforensic analysis focuses not just on language features but also on facts, communication, persuasion, and context-driven meaning. The present study examines speech acts, cooperative principles, presuppositions, and implicatures, focusing on how these elements influence the interpretation of evidence. With this, how meaning is conveyed through language use in context, often to persuade, hide, reveal, or dodge responsibility, can be seen. By extension, the way forensic evidence is presented and analyzed can impact legal reasoning and the outcome of a legal procedure.

Research Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative case study to analyze the sampled courtroom texts/excerpts. This research approach was adopted for its ability to conduct an in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of language use in a real-life situation, employing the researcher's direct fieldwork to collect raw data from courtroom interactions. In other words, the data for this study were sourced from courtroom statements made by witnesses. The researcher, who was physically present at the court, audio-recorded the testimonies and evidence presented during the trials of criminal cases at the Ondo State High Court, Akure. These audio recordings captured the raw use of language in the course of giving evidence and testimonies and responding to cross-examinations within the courtroom setting.

The corpora recorded during the proceedings were large, and five excerpts or texts were purposively sampled and carefully isolated for critical evaluation, highlighting the pragmatic features that are significant in forensic analysis.

The excerpts were selected based on factors such as how rich they are in pragmatic features, how relevant those features are to legal discourse, and the implications of forensic features for the interpretation of meaning. The pragmatic features identified in the sampled texts were those that carry forensic or legal implications, not merely linguistic or stylistic effects. The justification for the sampled choice of pragmatic features is that leading scholars (Bhatia, 2012; Wright, 2025; Kalejaiye & Oyagiri, 2025), who have worked on legal pragmatics, have confirmed that speech acts, presupposition, implicature, and the cooperative principle are the prominent instruments that could be used in carrying out a robust analysis of pragmatic features in legal discourse.

The analysis was carried out in three broad stages. The first stage was the transcription of the selected excerpts, with attention to the parts rich in pragmatic features and relevant to pragmforensic analysis. Secondly, these parts, which are rich in pragmatic features, were purposively culled from the entire texts and serially numbered 1 to 5 for analysis. Thirdly, the pragmatic features in the serially numbered data were analyzed, reflecting how strategic

communication impacts meaning. This approach, which ensures that data are examined within the legal framework, focuses on natural courtroom interactions, which are in tandem with forensic linguistic analysis methodologies that utilize qualitative, context-sensitive analysis to show how pragmatic elements influence legal interpretation and judicial outcomes.

This study ensures that ethical standards were observed to the effect that the data were used exclusively for research purposes. The actual names of the participants and the specific courts in the Ondo State High Court, Akure, were anonymized for the purpose of confidentiality. The comparative advantage of the limited data was that it allowed a deeper, and more detailed analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation upon which this study rests is an integration of the assumptions of pragmatic theory and forensic linguistics, with some relevant insights drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This makes the study a multidisciplinary analysis of how meaning can be constructed, decoded, and manipulated in courtroom discourse.

The analysis done in this study is based on concepts such as speech act theory, Gricean implicature, presupposition, and the cooperative principle, which are central to pragmatic analysis. These analytical frameworks provide critical insights into how meaning is constructed and decoded through context and intention. Speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) provides a means of understanding how courtroom utterances function as actions, to either assert, accuse, deny, or justify, rather than as mere statements of fact. Furthermore, Grice's (1975) notion of implicature and the cooperative principle presents an insight into how meaning can be strategically conveyed, implied, or distorted by participants in legal discourse.

These insights, drawn from pragmatic analysis, are directly related to the broader purview of forensic linguistics, which is an investigation into the general use and essence of language in legal processes (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Gibbons & Turell, 2008). This study has extended the traditional analytical framework of pragmatics and forensic linguistics by proposing a new approach, pragmaforensic analysis, which emphasizes the interpretive significance and legal implications of the identified pragmatic features.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015) is integrated into pragmatic theory and forensic linguistics, the main theoretical foundation of this study, to account for how language can influence and can be influenced by a speaker's intention and the dynamics of the institution. By critically examining the intricacies of meaning in legal discourse, CDA equips researchers with the theoretical tools to uncover how pragmatic features are deployed to shape interpretations and influence legal outcomes (Aina *et al*, 2018; Kalejaiye & Oyagiri, 2025; Ogban-Uwan, 2023). The relevance of this theory is evident in how participants in courtroom interactions choose from available linguistic alternatives to frame evidence and reveal or point to hidden meanings. Furthermore, CDA's focus on legal context aligns with the aim of this study, which is

to promote greater linguistic sensitivity and justice in legal processes, especially in bilingual settings (Gibbons & Turell, 2008).

It should be noted that CDA is not the major theoretical framework for this study; however, it is relevant, as it offers a useful perspective on how pragmatic elements function to show authority and persuasion while presenting evidence, giving testimony, and responding to cross-examinations in courtroom discourse.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The pragmaforensic analysis of witnesses' statements, focusing on the speech act, conversational implicature, cooperative principle, and presupposition, is carried out. The actual utterances with pragmaforensic features are culled from recorded courtroom interactions between lawyers and litigants, are serially numbered, and are presented below for analysis.

1. Witness's Statement:

"Well, when I was going back from the store—which I have said I normally do around that time—I was looking at Mr. Adeyemi quickly running away from that building, and the fire had already started burning high and high. I assumed he was supposed to call people for help. I made efforts to call him and other people around, but Mr. Adeyemi didn't even bother to respond or look back, and this was a strange attitude. I want to believe that he was trying to hide something, or how else do I explain such a strange attitude? I didn't see everything that happened, but I knew something was not alright."

Pragmaforensic Analysis

From the witness's statement, we can see an interplay of pragmatic features that contribute to the forensic value of the courtroom discourse.

From the pragmatic angle of presupposition, the witness's specific calling of the name of the suspect, "Mr. Adeyemi," presupposes that he is well known to the witness. Furthermore, the expression *"How do I explain..."* at the end of the witness's statement presupposes that Mr. Adeyemi's behavior is, in fact, strange. With this conclusion, the witness has already given the court and the investigators an idea that Mr. Adeyemi's behavior was inherently suspicious. The clause, *"...which I normally do around that time,"* presupposes a habitual/routine/everyday action, which can function to establish that the witness is a credible eyewitness who is quite familiar with that environment and could easily recognize or spot any unusual occurrences. It can also indicate a sense of accuracy, as he knows the time he normally goes to the store. Although we cannot accurately determine the witness's status, it could suggest that he either works at the store or regularly visits it to buy or supply items. The pragmatic forensic implication of this is to establish credibility and make the witness appear to know what he is saying as a firsthand witness. The statement *"He was trying to hide something..."* after the witness had already said *"running away from that building"* may presuppose suspicion and guilt without much clear evidence.

In terms of speech acts, the witness's statement is largely assertive, which makes it appear the witness is committed to the truth of the matter. However, the final sentence "*I want to believe that he was trying to hide something*" indicates a shift from an assertive (objective reporting) to an expressive/verdictive speech act, which is rather subjective.

The forensic implication of the use of the performative verb "*...want to believe*" is that the witness shifts from reporting the exact thing (what he saw) to providing a subjective interpretation (what he thinks or believes). In this context, the forensic implication of this statement is that it is speculative; therefore, it has to be treated carefully in the determination of the case, as it can affect the veracity of his claims. The perlocutionary effect intended in this statement is to subtly persuade the court that Mr. Adeyemi is guilty without much or further investigation. Also, "*I assumed*" is a conversational implicature that indicates that the eyewitness is only speculating rather than giving factual evidence. The pragmatic forensic implication of this witness's statement is that he is suspecting the accused while technically avoiding open accusation.

At that moment, the witness did not know why Mr. Adeyemi was running away. So, for him to assume Mr. Adeyemi was supposed to call people for help was unfounded and, therefore, judgmental. The witness uses conversational implicature to explain that Mr. Adeyemi failed to look back when he was "*running away from the building,*" despite the witness's efforts to call him. That Mr. Adeyemi was running away from the building without responding to a call and without looking back or calling for help is suspicious and may imply guilt or evasion.

Furthermore, by saying, "*This was a strange attitude,*" the witness implies more than what is literally said. Strange in what sense? Maybe the witness still has to provide more explanation during cross-examination.

The witness does not directly say Mr. Adeyemi started the fire; however, describing his behavior as "strange" implies that he is a guilty person fleeing a crime scene. "*Running away from the building*" and "*... didn't even bother to respond or look back*" are assertive statements subtly deployed to perform an accusation. With this, the witness may be leading the court towards a biased conclusion.

From the perspective of the cooperative principle, the comment clause "*which I normally do around that time*" is over-informative, violating the maxim of quantity. The pragmaforensic significance of this "over-informative statement" is that it is a strategy used to heighten the acceptability of the statement. Also, the witness's "unsolicited storytelling" is not merely reporting a scene but actively giving a narrative that is suggestive of guilt. However, rather than being irrelevant, this claim of routine justifies the witness's presence at the scene at the time.

Overall, the statement shows how pragmatic devices can be used to construct meaning and guide interpretation. The witness avoids direct accusations, making his statement full of pragmatic features that suggest the suspect is guilty. This reinforces the claim that in pragmaforensic analysis

of courtroom discourse, meaning can be explicit or implied. This reflects on Objective 2, which shows how pragmatic elements can influence meaning and interpretation.

2) Eyewitness Testimony

Lawyer: *Ms. Adewale, I want you to explain to this honorable court your observations when you were leaving the bank premises at around 4:45 p.m. on Tuesday, the 23rd of September, 2025.*

Witness: *When I was stepping out of the bank premises, sir, I saw the man in the dark jacket who was running towards the junction with a strange appearance around that area. I did not see or know what was happening inside the bank, but I noticed the alarm was not working as expected. As he ran, he looked back suspiciously, as if he expected someone to run after him. To be sincere, I couldn't recognize who the man was, but I knew in my mind that something must have gone wrong or something bad was happening. Abi, what could make a grown-up man run like that? I left the place too because I was afraid because I didn't know what could happen next.*

Pragmforensic Analysis

In the witness's statement, many pragmatic elements are deployed, showing observable facts and subjective defenses of positions, all of which have implications for the reliability of the evidence. The statement is full of assertive speech acts, which indicate the witness's commitment to the truth of what he witnessed. However, there are frequent shifts toward expressives and directives toward the end. These shifts in her statements carry significant implications for their interpretation. "*I knew strongly in my mind that something must have gone wrong*" is expressive, which indicates the witness's subjectivity and emotional involvement in recounting the event, which does not, in any way, present any concrete evidence or facts. Furthermore, this indicates that the witness's emotional state or personal suspicion, rather than unbiased observation, plays a significant role in her recall of the event.

"*Abi, what could make a grown-up man run like that?*" is an emotionally charged rhetorical question, expressing her concern and confusion. This is a directive act that could mean an attempt to lead the court toward a skewed conclusion. The use of "*abi*," a Yoruba word literally meaning "or" in the context, suggests her disbelief in and concern about the man's strange action, suggesting that something was wrong.

"*To be sincere, I can't lie...*" is an indirect directive speech that intends to emphasize and strengthen the witness's honesty, thereby urging the court to trust her testimony, despite the absence of clear evidence. By implication, this blend of factual reporting with what appear to be emotional responses can make her statements subjective and less reliable.

Conversational implicature is observable in the description "*looking back suspiciously as if he were expecting someone to run to follow him.*" The witness's effort to describe the man's behavior (how he was looking back and what she thought he was expecting) may project suspicion and

evasiveness, which may indirectly suggest that the man is already guilty as charged without explicit evidence to convict him.

Looking at the statement through the lens of the cooperative principle, the maxim of quantity was violated, as the witness provided superfluous information beyond what the lawyer requested: *"I did not see or know what was happening inside the bank."* She included unnecessary details about what was happening inside the bank, which was none of her business. Also, the expression "I could not recognize who the man was," though implied in the earlier statement, is repeated. As a result, some aspects of the information given by the witness are superfluous, as they contribute nothing to the facts needed for the determination of the case at hand.

The maxim of quality was also flouted in the witness's strong assertion that *"something must have gone wrong or something bad was happening."* This violates the maxim of quality, as the statement was not based on fact and lacked sufficient evidence.

The witness's expression *"to be sincere, I can't lie"* is a clear example of hedging, categorized under the maxim of quality. In forensic analysis, an unsolicited promise like this may not really mean deception. It can function pragmatically to make the statement appear factual, and, by extension, to influence the court to have some trust in her account.

"...but I noticed the alarm was not working as expected." The information about the alarm not working is in a way relevant because it implies a likely security issue; however, its connection with the major issue or fact of the matter is not quite clear. Also, *"...as expected"* is an extra and unsolicited piece of information, which is her own personal view.

The pragmaforensic implication of the witness's flouting of the maxims is that she was, in a way, emotionally driven and biased rather than being purely factual, objective, or dispassionate.

In the witness's statements, there are instances of the assumption of certain facts that were not directly stated. For instance, *"I saw the man in the dark jacket who was running towards the junction with a strange appearance around that area"* presupposes accuracy and reliability, even though it is vague. From the witness's statement, it can be presupposed that he might have seen something more significant about the man's appearance, which might later be a subject of further interrogation or cross-examination. There is also an implicit assumption in the witness's statement: *"I noticed the alarm was not working as expected."* This presupposes that everybody in the court understands that the alarm is usually functioning. The identified presuppositions can influence the interpretation of the witness's statement.

In all, this testimony illustrates how evidence can be interpreted in light of the pragmatic elements deployed. The witness's statement contains some relevant details; however, the reliability of the witness's statement in this forensic context may be affected as a result of the combination of fact and personal opinion. By this, research objective 2 is fulfilled by showing how pragmatic features

in the eyewitness's statement can be interpreted to indicate that the suspect is suspicious, despite the paucity of clear and direct evidence.

3) Murder suspect statement:

"I never go anywhere looking for trouble. I didn't go there with the intention to hurt anybody. Ade is my friend, and we lived together before. My own was just to get my stuff back. Daddy, my Lord, I am a gentle person. I don't find trouble. I was talking to him as a gentleman, but he was proving difficult. You don't know this guy; he is my friend. To God, who made me, he was the one who pushed me. In that moment, everything just disappeared. I wasn't even in control anymore, and I fell down. Still, I tried not to strike him, but, in fact, when he punched me and pushed me again, I lost my control. I didn't want to hit him, but it was not anger, but I tried to defend myself. That was what happened, sir."

Pragmforensic Analysis

Several pragmatic devices are used in the statement, whereby the meaning of some expressions is indirectly implied. For example, *"I never go anywhere looking for trouble"* and *"I didn't go there with the intention to hurt anybody"* are assertive statements that, in a way, justify the speaker's action and show his innocence. The speaker's repeated denials of intent to harm others are an attempt to further prove or emphasize his innocence. However, the credibility of these denials is important in determining the suspect's innocence, culpability, and level of responsibility.

The statement *"I tried not to strike him, but... I lost my control"* can be viewed as an excuse speech act, which implies that the suspect's action was not deliberate; rather, it was a reaction to being pushed to the wall, where he had to defend himself. The pragmforensic implication of the speech act is that it is a self-confession, which means that he actually did what he was being accused of.

In the statement, there are instances of implicature that imply self-defense or self-justification. The statements *"Ade is my friend; we lived together before"* imply that the suspect had a good, non-violent relationship with the victim before the incident. This can further suggest that what happened was accidental, as there was no intention to harm the victim. These clauses, *"He was the one who pushed me"* and *"I tried to defend myself,"* may further suggest that the murder was not premeditated but a reaction to aggression, which could be interpreted as self-defense. The statement *"I lost my control"* may indicate that he had endured to the point where he could no longer endure and that he was provoked to the point of losing control. The pragmforensic significance of these is to help in the determination of the culpability of the suspect and the severity of his offense.

With reference to the cooperative principle, the information provided by the speaker is just enough to clarify his actions and intentions without irrelevant details. For instance, *"I didn't go there with the intention to hurt anybody"* and *"I never go anywhere looking for trouble"* reveal the intent of the suspect, which is an assertion that is relevant to the issue under investigation. In line with the

maxim of quality. However, the clause "*to be sincere, I can't lie*" is a strategy deployed to enhance the credibility of his account. This may have flouted the maxim of quantity, as it exceeds what is required and, by implication, raises some doubts about the relevance and consistency of the explanation.

However, some expressions, such as "*everything just disappeared*" and "*I wasn't even in control anymore,*" flout the maxim of manner, as they are rather vague and difficult to pin down to a precise meaning. This obscurity in these expressions can be perceived as an effort to hide something or as a ploy not to say everything the suspect knows.

When we consider the statement in terms of presupposition, we see that there are background pieces of information assumed to be true only within the context of the statement, which serves as the foundation for the main claim. The statement "*he punched me and pushed me again*" presupposes that violence had already escalated. It presupposes that the suspect's actions were a reaction to the victim's actions. Through this presupposition we get to know that it was the victim who first acted violently, and this may help the accused to build a self-defense case.

In the expression "*Ade is my friend,*" there is a presupposition of trust and a good relationship between the suspect and the victim, which is consistent with the argument that the conflict was unexpected and the killing accidental.

In summary, a critical appraisal of this statement reveals how pragmatic resources can be strategically deployed to show that the suspect was being reactive rather than being intentional. The statement shows instances of subtle denial, justification, and self-defense used in order to reduce culpability. This supports research objective 2.

4) The Defendant's Recorded Phone Call

The evidence: *The recording of a phone call made by the defendant a few hours after the alleged crime was committed is played. In the call, the defendant was talking to an unidentified person:*

Defendant recorded phone call: *"Brotherhood, let me make myself clear as much as possible now. You must ensure you handle that package carefully. Understand? And when you have acted or delivered it, then you can call me immediately. Don't forget that I always know what to do, you understand? Don't pretend you don't know me and what I can do even from here now. If you don't call me immediately, I will fuck you up, as you know me. I wish you were smart like Ken. Nobody can catch Ken or me, but you... I can't trust. Take something before the operation. But if you are caught, don't mention my name. Oh, but then I will definitely get help for you. You know me now."*

Pragmaforensic Analysis:

From the perspective of speech acts, the recorded phone call is full of directives, threats, promises, and exaggeration, which suggests a master-subordinate relationship between the defendant and the recipient. This view is supported by threats such as "*I will deal with you,*" "*I will...get help for*

you," and *"you must ensure that..."* The defendant telling the recipient, *"If you don't call me immediately, I will fuck you up, as you know me,"* is an act of threat implying a power dynamic and the superiority of the defendant. This can be interpreted as an attempt to instill fear in the mind of the recipient so as to get him into committing the criminal act, and this further proves the defendant's culpability.

The defendant's repeated reference to his ability and authority, for example, *"Don't pretend you don't know me,"* and *"Nobody can catch me or Ken, but you... I can't trust,"* are suggestive of overconfidence in his ability to evade law enforcement. As a result, the investigators will view the defendant's abilities differently. The defendant's use of the commissive *"But if you are caught... I will definitely get help for you"* is an assurance or promise, suggesting that if the recipient is apprehended, the defendant will definitely help him. The implication of this promise is that the defendant is a member of an influential criminal cartel that could get help to a member in trouble. The statement, *"If you are caught, don't mention my name, oh,"* implies he is well aware of the possibility of being caught despite his overconfidence.

Talking about the cooperative principle, the defendant's instruction to the recipient is concise and informative enough without overwhelming him with superfluous details. This is in line with the maxims of relevance and quantity. For example, *"When you have acted or delivered it, then you can call me immediately"* gives just enough directive on what is expected and the steps to take. The pragmatic forensic implication of this is that in crime communication, there is no room for a waste of time or verbosity, as brevity and clarity of directives are of the essence. The defendant appears to speak truthfully, adhering to the maxim of quality; however, some aspects are less than truthful. For example, *"Nobody can catch me or Ken,"* which appears as truth but implies overconfidence, could also be taken as an exaggeration or falsehood said to boost the defendant's image and the recipient's morale. By implication, this defendant's statement has now been seen as exaggerated, and it would cast doubt on his credibility.

The defendant flouted the maxim of manner with his somewhat ambiguous statements, especially when he said, *"But if you are caught, don't mention my name, oh."* This may suggest he does not want to take responsibility while still promising assistance if things go wrong. The vagueness and indirectness in certain parts of the conversation could suggest an effort to avoid direct association with the illegal acts.

There is a clear case of presupposition in the statement. The way the caller coordinated the recipient's activities and tried to avoid legal responsibility while still managing or mitigating the possible risks associated with the crime suggests he is more experienced. The defendant saying, *"Take something before the operation, oh,"* without explaining what "something" and "operation" mean presupposes that the defendant and the recipient share a common understanding of what "operation" and "something" mean, and it is likely an illegal activity. The pragmaforensic implication of the use of such esoteric or coded language presupposes a mutual understanding

between the parties involved. This could serve as key evidence that both parties were aware of the criminal nature of their actions. The statement *"I will fuck you up, as you know me"* presupposes that the recipient knows quite well that the defendant is violent in nature and capable of causing him harm. With this, it can be established that if his plans are not carried out, the defendant may become violent.

Finally, the speaker's use of coded language, directives, and threats indicates his undeniable involvement in a coordinated crime and his desperate attempt to conceal it. This is in line with Objective 2.

5) The expert witness's opinion:

The defense lawyer's question: *"So, Dr. Joseph, please, tell this honorable court, would you agree that the error margin in this DNA analysis is negligible?"*

The expert witness's answer: *"Well, while saying that advancement in technology is certainly a reality we cannot deny, permit me to say that the statistical probabilities are indeed very low in many cases. Anyway, I guess it is better or more accurate to say the margin of error is minimal rather than strictly negligible. It must be noted that there are always natural limitations in any scientific experiment or methodology, you understand? Man is not God, who knows everything. I think that is all I can say about this issue, please."*

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The witness makes numerous assertions in his response. For instance, *"the statistical probabilities are indeed very low in many cases"* and *"there are always natural limitations in any scientific experiment or methodology."* These expert statements about the nature of DNA analysis are assertive, which may imply that as reliable as DNA results can be, they are not totally infallible. The significance of this assertion is that errors are possible, however marginal the possibility may be. The expert witness uses hedging to moderate his opinion by stating, *"It is better or more accurate to say that the margin of error can be said to be minimal rather than strictly negligible."* This shows an effort not to say what may be used to hold him responsible for his speech. This degree of doubt discernible in the statement carries some forensic implications, because it can weaken the earlier claim that indicates the DNA result is absolutely reliable. A reference to the infallibility of God in the expert's statement, *"Man is not God, who knows everything"* implies that human knowledge has its limitations.

Instances of implicature can also be seen in the statement. Saying that the error margin is better described as *"minimal"* rather than *"negligible"* implies that, though the DNA result is reliable, it is not exclusively free from error, however negligible it is. The pragmaforensic implication of this implicature is that there can be a possibility of error in the DNA result. This can lead us to conclude that the possibility of error, no matter how minimal, can lead to wrong decision-making in the courtroom. The statement *"There are always natural limitations in any scientific experiment or*

methodology” clearly means that human knowledge in science is limited, which, in pragmaforensic analysis, may mean that the court has verifiable reasons to doubt the reliability of the DNA result.

Looking at the statement from the angle of the cooperative principle, one can say that the expert’s opinion adheres to the maxims of quality and manner. As a clear and relevant response, it strengthens the integrity of the legal process; however, the hedging, “*it is better or more accurate to say...*” indicates the response is precise without being certain. In the statement, it can be observed that the maxim of manner is adhered to as the expert’s professionalism avoids overstatements. This may be interpreted by the court as a show of integrity, kind of. The clauses “*the statistical probabilities are indeed very low*” and “*there are always natural limitations*” appear truthful and not misleading. This position is supported by verifiable scientific evidence and knowledge. By implication, the integrity of the expert's statement hinges on its verifiability and credibility.

In conclusion, this witness's opinion illustrates how analysis of language can reveal caution, certainty, opinion, or bias. Scientific evidence is usually foolproof, all things being equal; however, the interpretation and reliability of the evidence can be influenced by the linguistic choices made in the courtroom. This is a response to Objective 2.

Discussion

Our findings in this research work reveal that pragmatic elements are strong contextual devices that are capable of impacting courtroom discourse (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Gibbons & Turell, 2008). From the data presented and analyzed, it is revealed that courtroom participants can construct or subtly modify meaning or conceal intentions through the strategic use of pragmatic elements (Cotterill, 2003; Heffer, 2005). In courtroom discourse, participants did not entirely use explicit expressions; instead, they used statements full of pragmatic elements that signal a blend of fact, speculation, and inference (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). The first objective of the study is hereby realized, as it presents numerous pragmatic elements in the courtroom evidence and testimonies analyzed.

Apart from identifying pragmatic elements in the texts, the study reveals how significantly pragmatic elements can impact interpretation (Conley et al., 2019; Durant & Leung, 2016). It is also revealed that the speaker’s choice of language can oscillate between facts and speculations, thereby loading the accounts with assumptions and subjectivities (Heffer, 2005). With these pragmatic elements identified in the evidence and testimonies, ordinary observations or casual claims can be analyzed as facts, thereby technically influencing the interpretation of utterances (Levinson, 1983; Grice, 1975). Meaning in courtroom discourse is not directly decoded from the statement that is made but inferred through how the statement is made (Gibbons & Turell, 2008). The second objective of the study is realized not only by showing that pragmatic elements are

predominantly used in courtroom evidence and testimonies but also by indicating how these elements actively influence their interpretation and intention.

The use of code-switching "*abi*" and the different levels of the speakers' (witnesses' and suspects') competence in English can further compromise or complicate speakers' intentions and meaning-making processes (Aina et al., 2018; Sogunro et al., 2024). In such situations, pragmatic features may be misinterpreted by participants, increasing the risk of unintentional misinterpretation. This has implications for the multicultural and multilingual courtroom setting, such as in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study examines the pragmaforensic effects of the pragmatic elements identified in some courtroom interactions. It is observed that the pragmatic elements influence how courtroom evidence is viewed, analyzed, challenged, and acted upon. With this, the study has addressed its two objectives: identifying and analyzing the pragmatic features in courtroom evidence and testimony and critically examining their effects on perceptions and interpretations of statements in courtrooms. The outcome of this study supports the fact that pragmaforensic analysis is a valid way of investigating language-related legal issues in Nigeria, because it is more context-sensitive.

This study concludes that pragmatic elements play a very important role in the evaluation of evidence and the interpretation of meaning in courtroom discourse, which supports the central position that the linguistic choices made can directly influence outcomes of legal proceedings.

Future research can broaden the scope of this research work by analyzing a larger corpus of courtroom statements, considering not only contextual elements and pragmatic features but also nonverbal cues and prosody in determining the meaning of utterances.

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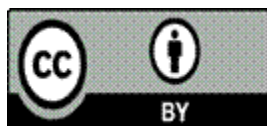
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