



OFFICER, IT'S THE DEVIL'S WORK: THE PRAGMATICS OF DEFENCE IN POLICE-SUSPECT INTERROGATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In the Nigerian context, the clause "Officer, it's the devil's work" serves as a culturally resonant defense mechanism, reflecting deeply embedded societal and religious beliefs. Hence, this paper examines the pragmatics of defense in police-suspect interrogations in Nigeria. Within Nigeria's legal and cultural context, suspects often employ language to frame their actions and provide justifications under the intense psychological pressures of interrogations. The paper adopts Grice's maxims (quality, quantity, relevance and manner) as the theoretical framework for analysis. This framework is considered appropriate as it offers a structured lens for examining the pragmatic strategies employed by suspects during interrogations. Four documented cases involving offences such as kidnapping, rape, grievous harm, and murder were purposefully selected from online news articles, social media reports, and the transcript of a recorded police-suspect interrogation video. Findings revealed that the recurring invocation of "the devil's work" demonstrates how language can serve as a tool for psychological evasion and manipulation during interrogations. This clause not only shifts blame to an external force but also invokes a cultural framework that resonates with both the speaker and the audience, thereby softening the perception of culpability. The study concludes that these strategies employed by suspects are not merely attempts to evade guilt; they also serve as tactics to manage the psychological pressures of the interrogation process and, importantly, to shift the burden of proof back onto law enforcement.

Keywords: Pragmatics, defence, police-suspect, interrogation

Background

The language used in police-suspect interactions has evolved significantly, particularly in Nigeria. Ajayi (2014) suggests that the term "interrogation" is no longer employed by the Nigerian Police, following campaigns by human rights activists who opposed its use. In contrast, Almeida (2018) contends that police officers design their actions to secure confessions, thereby justifying the term "police interrogation" to describe these interactions. This shift highlights the complex dynamics between language, power, and human rights within the context of law enforcement. In police-suspect interrogations, suspects often employ linguistic strategies as pragmatic defenses to explain, justify, or

rationalize their actions in ways that mitigate their legal culpability. These strategies serve to reframe the narrative, offering suspects an opportunity to avoid full responsibility for their alleged actions. Such defenses are deeply influenced by linguistic, psychological, cultural, and situational factors, reflecting a complex interplay between language, power dynamics, and social context. This discussion explores the pragmatics of defense in interrogations, examining how suspects use language—such as the phrase "it's the devil's work"—to shape their narratives and achieve specific communicative goals, often as a reaction to the psychological and linguistic pressures exerted by interrogators.

Language in police-suspect interrogations is crucial in shaping the criminal justice process, influencing power dynamics and negotiation. Stokoe (2018) highlights that interrogation discourse is driven by both the interrogator's and suspect's strategies, where language serves as a tool for negotiation, resistance, and self-representation. Suspects often use verbal tactics to justify their actions, such as invoking cultural or psychological explanations. For instance, a suspect might claim, "Officer, it's the devil's work," which reflects cultural or religious beliefs and challenges traditional legal interpretations, raising important questions about the role of culture and belief in the interrogation process. Cultural beliefs, particularly in societies where spirituality and the supernatural play significant roles, can shape how individuals perceive and explain their actions. For some, attributing wrong doing to external, supernatural forces may be a genuine reflection of their worldview rather than a deliberate attempt to evade responsibility. Similarly, psychological factors, such as stress, fear, or cognitive dissonance, may drive suspects to frame their actions in ways that align with their belief systems. Matsumoto & Hwang (2021) argue that cultural belief systems profoundly influence how individuals explain behavior. In societies where spirituality is significant, references to supernatural forces may be genuine attempts to contextualize actions rather than mere excuses.

This interplay between language, culture, and psychology underscores the complexity of police interrogations. It challenges legal practitioners to consider how these factors might influence the interpretation of suspect statements and, ultimately, the pursuit of justice. According to Beloof (2021), in adversarial legal systems, suspects' statements during interrogations are not just evidentiary but also reflective of their psychological states and cultural frameworks, requiring careful interpretation to avoid misjudgment. Recognizing and understanding such defenses, however unconventional, can foster a more nuanced approach to the interrogation process—one that balances cultural sensitivity with legal rigor.

In exploring the phrase "Officer, it's the devil's work" within the context of police-suspect interrogations, it becomes apparent that such statements carry nuanced meanings, reflective of both linguistic strategies and cultural factors. The phrase embodies a common form of linguistic evasion often seen in suspect responses during police interviews, where invoking supernatural or external forces serves to deflect guilt or responsibility. This review will examine the concept from multiple angles, using literature from pragmatics, discourse analysis, and criminology to unpack its functions within interrogation settings.

Pragmatics in Police-Suspect Interrogations

Pragmatics provides a lens to analyze how language functions in police interrogations, particularly in the context of psychological and cultural defense mechanisms. Speech Act

Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) underscores that statements like "Officer, it's the devil's work" transcend mere communication, functioning instead to mitigate guilt and manage social perception. Gudjonsson (2003) highlights that invoking supernatural forces is often a strategy to deflect personal responsibility, shaped by cultural beliefs. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize how suspects' language choices—particularly metaphors or justifications — are attempts to negotiate perceptions during high-stakes interactions.

Suspects employ language as a mechanism to frame their actions in ways that align with their personal beliefs, cultural values, or emotional states. Their responses often reflect a conscious or subconscious effort to preserve their self-image, reduce culpability, or avoid severe consequences. Below are ways in which suspects construct narratives and seek. Language is often used to diminish the suspect's perceived role in the offense. Blaming external factors, such as peer influence or systemic issues, can serve to reduce personal accountability. Smith (2023) examines how language used in police interrogations influences perceptions of guilt and responsibility, focusing on how suspects' involvement is portrayed through rhetorical strategies. In interrogations, language can reduce a suspect's accountability by shifting blame to external factors, such as peer pressure or systemic problems.

Language, Psychological Defense Mechanisms, and Strategies of Evasion

Language in police-suspect interrogations goes beyond mere communication, serving as a psychological tool that profoundly shapes the interaction between the interrogator and the suspect. Ajayi (2017, p. 225) emphasizes that police interrogations often involve psychological manipulation, with officers using various tactics to influence the suspect's emotions, thoughts, and behavior. These tactics can range from subtle strategies, such as exploiting the suspect's fears or guilt, to more direct methods like intimidation, all aimed at encouraging the suspect to cooperate or confess.

Ogolekwu (2021) asserts that language is fundamental to all human activities, serving as a tool for communication and identification. In the context of police interrogations, this concept can be extended to the suspect's use of language. Suspects strategically use language to express their version of events, justify their actions, or assert their innocence. Their choice of words, tone, and narrative strategies often reflect personal, cultural, or psychological factors, revealing their mindset, background, and intentions. This makes language not only a tool for communication but also an identifier of the suspect's emotional and cognitive state. The way language is employed can influence the suspect's willingness to cooperate, confess, or alter their story.

From a psychological perspective, language in interrogations serves as a deliberate strategy to achieve specific objectives, such as extracting confessions, clarifying facts, or increasing compliance. One notable psychological tactic employed by suspects is the invocation of supernatural explanations as a defense mechanism. Studies by criminologists (Gudjonsson, 2003) show that suspects may invoke culturally resonant metaphors, such as blaming their actions on the "devil," in an effort to distance themselves from guilt and avoid direct moral judgment. This aligns with Denault's (2023) observation that interrogations often become negotiations, with suspects attempting to shift responsibility and influence perceptions of their actions.

Cultural Perspectives on Supernatural Attribution

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the language used in police interrogations, particularly in societies where beliefs in supernatural forces are prevalent. In many African, Caribbean, and Latin American cultures, invoking supernatural agents is a culturally ingrained way to express ideas about good and evil, especially in difficult or morally ambiguous situations (Nwoye, 2017). By invoking the “devil,” suspects tap into a culturally understood framework, which may influence how they view their own culpability or how they believe interrogators will interpret their actions.

In culturally diverse societies, suspects may frame their defenses within the context of deeply held beliefs or values. Supernatural Justifications: Invoking external, metaphysical forces, as in statements like “It was the devil’s work,” reflects a worldview where human behavior is influenced by spiritual or supernatural elements. Osisanwo & Adegbohin (2023) observe that during interrogations, suspects often blame the devil after confessing to committing a crime, portraying the devil as the ultimate instigator and source of all wrongdoing. In some societies, attributing actions to traditions or familial obligations provides context for behavior that may otherwise seem irrational or unjustifiable in a legal framework.

The Role of Language in Interrogation: A Comprehensive Overview

Forensic linguistics plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between language and law, providing critical insights that aid in solving crimes, securing justice, and enhancing legal processes. According to Ogolekwu (2020), forensic linguists examine spoken language by analyzing features such as accent, dialect, pronunciation, tone, and speech speed (p.43). Language extends beyond mere communication in these settings; it becomes a dynamic tool through which authority is asserted, persuasion is employed, and psychological strategies are applied. Interrogation, a cornerstone of law enforcement, plays a vital role in uncovering the truth, gathering essential information, and ensuring justice is served. This discussion examines the multifaceted role of language in interrogation, focusing on its strategic, psychological, and cultural dimensions, while addressing the ethical implications and grounding the analysis in empirical evidence.

Language as a Strategic Instrument in Police -suspect interrogations

In interrogations, language is meticulously crafted to achieve targeted outcomes, such as clarifying inconsistencies, eliciting confessions, or extracting valuable intelligence. Johari (2013, p. 662) states that police forces globally use a unique language that is often incomprehensible to those outside law enforcement. Johari further argues that police jargon is intentionally complex and designed to confuse the public, particularly during police-suspect interrogations. Its use capitalizes on inherent power imbalances between interrogator and suspect. Language performs the following function in police -suspect interrogations.

a. Questioning Techniques and Framing

Interrogators strategically tailor their questions to shape narratives and guide responses. In police interrogations, different types of questions are employed strategically

to control the flow of information, steer the conversation, and ultimately influence the suspect's narrative, often with the goal of obtaining a confession.

1. **Open-ended questions:** These invite suspects to provide more detailed responses, which can lead to unintended disclosures or inconsistencies that the interrogator can later exploit (Newbury & Johnson, 2006). Open-ended questions such as "What happened that night?" allow the suspect to elaborate without constraints, often revealing more than they initially intended.
2. **Closed questions:** These are designed to confirm specific facts or challenge the suspect's account by limiting the possible answers. For example, "Did you take the money?" forces a yes or no answer, making it easier for the interrogator to track inconsistencies or contradictions in the suspect's responses.
3. **Leading questions:** In police-suspect interrogations, leading questions are employed to subtly guide suspects toward specific answers by suggesting that certain facts are already established. This technique pressures suspects to confirm or deny the interrogator's assumptions, which can distort the course of the interrogation and hinder the suspect's ability to provide an independent response. Such psychological tactics often manipulate the suspect into aligning with the interrogator's narrative, potentially leading to false confessions or inaccurate information (Gudjonsson, 2020). Such tactics exploit emotional vulnerabilities and can distort the interrogation process, as suspects are led to confirm assumptions, even when those assumptions do not reflect the truth.
4. **Repetition and paraphrasing:** These tactics serve to emphasize contradictions or compel the suspect to reconsider their earlier statements. By repeating a question or restating the suspect's words, interrogators can highlight inconsistencies, subtly reinforcing their desired version of events and pressuring the suspect to conform to that narrative.
5. **Suggestive questions:** Suggestive language in interrogations can influence suspects by framing questions to align with the interrogator's assumptions. For example, asking "You didn't mean to hurt anyone, did you?" implies the suspect's actions were unintentional, which may lead them to conform their response to fit this narrative, potentially causing a false confession. As Gudjonsson (2003) points out, such questions exert psychological pressure on the suspect to align their story with the interrogator's perspective, thereby distorting the truth.

Interrogators sometimes use suggestive language that guides the suspect toward a particular narrative. For example, asking, "You didn't mean to hurt anyone, did you?" implies an expectation of innocence or good intent, which might lead a suspect to admit guilt or downplay the severity of the crime. This manipulation is psychologically potent, as it plays on the suspect's fear of consequences and desire for approval from authority figures. Suggestive language in interrogations, like asking "You didn't mean to hurt anyone, did you?" can lead suspects toward admitting guilt or minimizing the crime. This tactic plays on the suspect's fear of consequences and desire to please authority, subtly influencing their responses.

b. Establishing language of Dominance and Authority

These questioning techniques highlight how interrogation dynamics are shaped by the power of language, influencing how suspects construct their narratives and potentially leading to false confessions under pressure. Mason (2023) examines how linguistic strategies and power dynamics in interrogations can confuse suspects, compel compliance, and sometimes result in false confessions. Mason explores how police leverage linguistic strategies and power dynamics during interrogations to control suspects, often leading to confusion, compliance, and false confessions. Below are instances of the language of dominance usages and suspects' defences.

➤ **Coercive Versus Persuasive expressions**

Language is a powerful tool in obtaining confessions, but its misuse can lead to coercion and unethical practices. Anumudu & Abaya (2019) analyzed the language patterns employed by the Nigerian police during crime investigations, identifying techniques such as formalization, interruptions, and targeted questioning to exert control. Similarly, Mason (2023) calls for procedural reforms to mitigate coercion and foster fairness in interrogations, emphasizing that these linguistic strategies often reinforce power dynamics and perpetuate social inequalities.

Verbal coercion in police interrogations can be highly influential, even in the absence of physical force. Statements like “This could go easier for you if you just tell us what happened” create psychological pressure by implying leniency or inevitability, which can lead suspects to confess regardless of guilt. Ahmad (2020) highlights that communication, involving the exchange of information, ideas, emotions, and attitudes through verbal and non-verbal means, plays a critical role in suspect interrogations, where it can be utilized either to gather information or exert coercion. Such tactics exploit the suspect’s vulnerability, risking false confessions and compromising the integrity of the interrogation process.

➤ **Suspect Defenses: Constructing Narratives and Seeking Justifications**

In the high-stakes environment of police interrogations, suspects do not merely endure the linguistic and psychological pressures imposed by interrogators; they actively engage in the interaction, crafting responses and narratives to navigate the situation. According to Wright & Roberts (2023), ethical rules place additional obligations on defense counsel to fulfill in their practice. Language binds people together and in the same way, it unbinds them depending on its variations of usage (Ogolekwu, Jibrin & Agu, 2022). Language of justification serves as a tool for suspects to rationalize, justify, or downplay their actions. Rather than being passive recipients of the interrogation process, suspects exhibit agency, utilizing language to shape their portrayal and influence the interpretation of their behavior.

The Ethical and Legal Implications of Language in Police-Suspect Interrogation

Language in police interrogations functions as more than just a means of communication; it is a potent tool that can significantly influence the interaction between the interrogator and the suspect. The way language is used in these encounters carries profound ethical and legal consequences, potentially affecting the fairness of the process, the rights of the suspect, and the outcome of the interrogation. Cetkovic (2017) emphasizes

that police discourse, especially during interrogations, often closely mirrors legal language. The strategic deployment of language by interrogators can result in confessions, uncover essential information, or, on the other hand, risk breaching justice. Ogolekwu & Ekpang (2023) argue that the communication strategies employed by legal professionals and the linguistic environment significantly influence language use. This discussion delves into the ethical and legal complexities inherent in the language used in police-suspect interrogations.

1. Ethical Considerations in the Use of Language

a. Coercion and Manipulation

One of the primary ethical concerns surrounding language in interrogations is the potential for coercion and manipulation. While interrogation tactics often involve psychological strategies aimed at encouraging cooperation or eliciting confessions, these techniques must not cross the line into coercion. Kassin, Drizin, Grisso, Gudjonsson, Leo & Redlich (2010) Such tactics risk undermining the integrity of the interrogation process and the validity of the confession obtained. These methods may create a heightened risk of false confessions by manipulating the suspect's perception of the evidence or their legal standing. This highlights the ethical and legal challenges of ensuring that language used in interrogations does not compromise justice.

b. Minimization and False Confessions

A tactic commonly employed in interrogations is minimization, where the interrogator downplays the severity of the crime to create an environment where the suspect feels comfortable confessing. Osisanwo & Adegboosin (2023) assert that suspects adopt a range of strategies to pursue their objectives, which can be viewed as manifestations of power. This technique is often effective in gaining a confession, it raises ethical concerns, particularly when the suspect is vulnerable or under psychological pressure. In some cases, suspects may confess to crimes they did not commit in response to minimization tactics or promises of leniency.

2. Legal Implications of Language Use

➤ Right to Silence and Miranda Warnings

From a legal standpoint, the language used during an interrogation must respect the suspect's rights, particularly the right to remain silent and the right to legal counsel. This is because, statements made by the suspect have the potential to either implicate or exonerate them (Osisanwo & Adegboosin, 2023). In the United States, for example, the Miranda warning mandates that suspects be informed of these rights in clear and understandable language before being questioned. Henning (2017) argues that defenders in U.S. courts often contribute to racial disparities in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, either through complicity or by directly harming Black youth through implicit bias, colorblindness, neglect, and discrimination. A violation of a suspect's rights can render confessions inadmissible in court, where linguistic analysis is frequently used to address ambiguities in legal principles.

Solan (2018, p. 354) explains that this approach allows the law to interpret and clarify unclear or ambiguous expressions, ensuring that legal proceedings and judgments are based

on precise understanding and application of language. This practice highlights the interplay between legal frameworks and linguistic analysis in achieving fairness and accuracy in judicial outcomes. According to Ekpang and Ogolekwu (2023), the presiding judge plays a unique and crucial role during the court proceedings, ensuring fairness and maintaining the court's credibility. The legal principle that underpins these rights is the recognition that suspects should not be coerced into providing self-incriminating information through ambiguous or misleading language.

The Intersection of Ethical and Legal Concerns

The ethical and legal dimensions of language in police interrogations are closely intertwined. Ethical considerations regarding coercion and manipulation can have direct legal consequences. If an interrogation tactic is deemed unethical, it can undermine the legal validity of the confession obtained. Ekpenyong & Tanyi (2019) suggest that language selection in any social or discursive situation is closely linked to the context and domain in which it is applied. For example, if an interrogator uses manipulative or coercive language to elicit a confession, this may violate the suspect's right to a fair trial or due process, resulting in the suppression of the confession as evidence.

In police-suspect interrogations, the vulnerability of suspects, especially those who are young, mentally ill, or emotionally distressed, must be carefully considered from both ethical and legal perspectives. Legal protections are designed to prevent coercion, but interrogators are ultimately responsible for ensuring these safeguards are respected by using language that upholds the suspect's rights and dignity. Ajayi & Akinrinlola (2020) highlight the role of non-verbal communication, specifically laughter, in police-suspect interactions. Their study explores how laughter, used by both the Investigating Police Officers (IPOs) and suspects, serves various purposes such as building rapport, reducing tension, manipulating verbal communication, deceiving, mocking, evading questions, and maintaining social order. Thus, this study provides insights into how suspects used external-syndrome as a strategy to escape lawful punishment.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Grice's Maxims as the theoretical framework for analysis. This framework is considered appropriate as it offers a structured lens for examining the pragmatic strategies employed by suspects during interrogations. The maxims are outlined below:

1. Maxim of Quality

This maxim emphasizes truth and evidence in communication. The tenets of the Maxim of Quality include the following principles:

- **Truthfulness:** Speak only what you believe to be true.
- **Evidence-based assertions:** Provide information supported by adequate evidence.
- **Avoid deception:** Do not knowingly convey falsehoods or fabricate information.
- **Clarity in intent:** Ensure that the information provided is not misleading, even indirectly.

2. Maxim of Quantity

This maxim ensures that communication is efficient and informative without being excessive or insufficient. The tenets of the Maxim of Quantity include:

- **Provide sufficient information:** Share as much information as is necessary for the conversation.
- **Avoid overloading with unnecessary details:** Do not provide more information than is required.
- **Be concise and focused:** Ensure your contributions are relevant and to the point.

3. Maxim of Relation/Relevance

This maxim demands that contributions be relevant to the ongoing conversation. This maxim helps to ensure coherence and focus in communication. The tenets of the Maxim of Relevance (or Relation) include:

- **Stay on topic:** Ensure that your contributions are directly related to the subject of the conversation.
- **Avoid irrelevance:** Do not introduce unrelated or distracting information.
- **Maintain context:** Align your responses with the situational and conversational context.

4. Maxim of Manner

This maxim focuses on avoiding ambiguity, obscurity, or disorder in communication. This maxim principle emphasizes clarity and simplicity to enhance understanding in communication. The tenets of the Maxim of Manner include:

- **Avoid ambiguity:** Communicate clearly and ensure your message is not open to multiple interpretations.
- **Be concise:** Use brief and straightforward expressions without unnecessary complexity.
- **Avoid obscurity:** Avoid using overly technical, vague, or difficult language.
- **Be orderly:** Present information in a logical and organized manner.

Grice's maxims offer a robust framework to decode the pragmatic layers of communication in police-suspect interrogations. They help uncover underlying strategies, cultural influences, and the dynamics of truth, relevance, and clarity in high-stakes dialogue.

Methodology

This research investigates the role of language in police-suspect interrogations in Nigeria, with a focus on pragmatic dimensions. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores the pragmatic functions and implications of the clause "Officer, it's the devil's work" as employed by suspects during interrogations. Four documented cases (Appendices 1–4) serve as primary and secondary data, involving offenses such as kidnapping, rape, grievous harm, and murder. The data were purposely sourced from online news articles, social media reports, and a transcript of a recorded police-suspect interrogation video. This paper adopts Grice's Maxims as a theoretical framework for analysis. The framework is

deemed appropriate because it provides a structured lens to explore the pragmatic strategies employed by suspects during interrogations.

The selection of data was based on two essential criteria: accessibility and authenticity. Accessibility denotes how readily the texts comprising the corpus could be accessed (Nwogu, 1997), whereas authenticity emphasizes the validity and trustworthiness of the evidence, ensuring it originates from credible and dependable sources (Mongalakwe, 2006). The data corpus includes four documented cases (Appendices 1–4) involving different criminal offenses: kidnapping, rape, grievous harm, and murder. These cases were selected because they are prevalent in Nigerian society today. The cases provide a diverse basis for analysis, highlighting variations in how the clause "It's the devil's work" is used across offences. The data were sourced from online news articles, social media content, and a transcript of a recorded interrogation between police and a suspect.

Each case offers a unique perspective as indicated below:

1. **Kidnapping (Appendix 1):** The suspect, who conspired to kidnap a neighbor and her child, attributed his actions to "the devil's work" during interrogation, pleading for mercy.
2. **Rape (Appendix 2):** A teacher accused of molesting pupils repeatedly claimed, "It's the devil's work," while attempting to justify his actions.
3. **Grievous Harm (Appendix 3):** A mother who poured boiling water on her daughter blamed the devil for her violent act during police questioning.
4. **Murder (Appendix 4):** A transcript of a Delta State police-suspect interrogation reveals the suspect confessing to stabbing a woman and attributing his crime to "the devil's work."

The analysis of these cases is anchored on linguistic pragmatics, exploring the clause's contextual usage and its implications.

Data Presentation
Table 1

EXCERPT 1	EXCERPT 2	EXCERPT 3	EXCERPT 4
I'm pleading for Mercy, it's the work of the devil , I don't really know what has come over me," he confessed. (APPENDIX 1)	At the police station, the teacher pleaded, "Please, spare me; I didn't know what came over me. The effect of what I did just dawned on me. I did not rape them. I only had sex with them. It's the devil's work. " (APPENDIX 2)	A woman residing in Lagos state, has blamed the devil for using her after she poured boiling water on her 13-year-old daughter's body in the Ilupeju area of the state on Tuesday July,30th....Mrs XXXX(name withheld) blamed the devil for using her to harm her daughter. (APPENDIX 3)	Police: You stabbed her from neck, hand and stomach Suspect: Yeah Police: Okay, how do you feel now? Suspect: I say, na devil's work. (APPENDIX 4)

Data Discussions

1. Maxim of Quality (Truthfulness)

In Excerpt 1, the statement "It's the work of the devil" lacks verifiable evidence, shifting blame to a supernatural force. This violates the maxim of quality as it evades personal accountability. The suspect's claim of remorse ("I don't really know what has come over me" further undermines sincerity, portraying himself as a passive victim of external forces rather than an active participant. Also in Excerpt 2, the statement likely violates the maxim of quality because, claiming that an external supernatural force caused his actions lacks evidence and challenges credibility. This defense may be seen as an attempt to evade accountability by attributing blame to a culturally significant entity, thus deflecting personal guilt.

In Excerpt 3 above, the case is not different. The mother's statement attributes her action to an external supernatural force that violates the maxim of quality. This is because the claim lacks evidence and truthfulness, serving as a defense mechanism to evade personal accountability for the harm inflicted on her daughter. Also, the suspect in Excerpt 4 initially provides vague or incomplete information, such as "Sometimes I dey do some kind things," which appears evasive. Later, the admission of "I dey lash her" and the subsequent narrative seem more truthful, likely due to the police's persistence. However, the final statement, "na devil's work," violates the maxim by attributing responsibility to an external, unverifiable force, diluting the sincerity of his earlier confession.

2. Maxim of Quantity (Adequacy of Information)

In Excerpt 1, the suspect violates the maxim of quantity because, the confession provides selective details: while the suspect admits receiving ₦60,000 for the ransom, he avoids explaining how the plan was executed or how the victims were targeted. By limiting the information, the suspect minimizes his role in the crime, adhering to a strategy of partial admission. The teacher in Excerpt 2, provides minimal information regarding his actions. While admitting to "having sex," he denies rape and shifts focus to "the devil," which omits critical details about intent, consent, or circumstances. This partial confession may be aimed at reducing perceived severity.

The violation of this maxim is also observed in Excerpt 3. The suspect's explanation does not provide enough information about her actual motivations or decision-making process. By blaming the devil, she omits key details that could clarify the rationale behind her behavior, making her statement incomplete. The suspect in Excerpt 4 offers sparse details initially, forcing the police to repeatedly probe for clarification. For example, the suspect's description of stabbing the victim evolves only after specific questions about the location and number of stabs. While this eventually provides sufficient information, the suspect's early reluctance shows an attempt to limit his liability by blaming the supernatural force (the devil) for his actions.

3. Maxim of Relevance/Relation (Staying on Topic)

In Excerpt 1, mentions of "the devil's work" and requests for mercy the suspect detracts from the main point, which is the intentional and premeditated nature of the crime. These irrelevancies shift focus away from the logical interrogation process, leveraging cultural beliefs to elicit empathy. The invocation of supernatural influence "It's the devil's work" in Excerpt 2 diverges from the factual interrogation of the incident. Instead of directly addressing his criminal behavior, the teacher introduces a culturally resonant but irrelevant explanation, attempting to realign the focus from his personal culpability to external forces.

In the same vein, the invocation of supernatural causation by the suspect in Excerpt 3 deviates from the immediate relevance of the interrogation's purpose, which is to understand the woman's intent and responsibility for the crime. Her statement shifts the focus from her own culpability to external which is a non-verifiable factor. The suspect's narrative frequently strays from direct relevance, such as referencing unrelated justifications. Evident in Excerpt 4 is the statement "She say make I gather money for her" where the suspect shifts the focus from the "stabbing incident" to a "financial grievance". The final statement, "na devil's work," similarly diverges, using culturally familiar rhetoric to deflect personal accountability.

4. Maxim of Manner (Clarity and Ambiguity)

As exemplified in Excerpt 1, claiming "it's the work of the devil" obfuscates his motives and direct involvement. The teacher's statement in Excerpt 2 is ambiguous and imprecise. By vaguely referencing "the devil," he avoids providing a clear rationale for his actions. This ambiguity serves to obscure intent and may function as a face-saving mechanism in a socially stigmatized scenario. The statement is vague and ambiguous, obscuring the true nature of her intentions.

By using a culturally resonant but unclear explanation, the female suspect in Excerpt 3 potentially attempts to mitigate societal and moral judgment, leaving the interrogators with limited actionable insight. In Excerpt 4, the suspect's language is ambiguous and informal, with phrases like "I dey lash her" requiring further clarification by the police. Additionally, the sequence of events is muddled, requiring the interrogator to repeatedly seek specific details, for instance "You stabbed her from back or from front?" This lack of clarity complicates the narrative and may reflect intentional obfuscation.

Pragmatic Considerations and Implications

In the Nigerian context, invoking the devil operates as a culturally resonant defense mechanism deeply rooted in societal and religious beliefs. This speech act serves as a face-saving strategy, reflecting a broader societal tendency to externalize blame and attribute actions to supernatural forces. By referencing the devil, suspects strategically distance themselves from their actions, portraying themselves as victims of uncontrollable influences rather than deliberate actors. Pragmatically, such statements function as tools for mitigating judgment and reducing both social and legal culpability. They leverage shared cultural and religious beliefs to blend expressions of remorse with an implicit appeal for empathy and leniency.

Supernatural explanations for wrongdoing are common in Nigerian society and often resonate with interrogators and the public. By invoking culturally accepted narratives of spiritual influence, suspects use language to negotiate perceptions, reduce stigma, and align their actions with shared societal values. These statements also operate as speech acts aimed at eliciting empathy and leniency, reflecting the interplay of cultural norms and pragmatic considerations in high-stakes interactions. The suspect's invocation of "Officer, it's the devil's work" encapsulates these dynamics, functioning as both a face-saving act and a calculated bid for leniency. This highlights how culturally ingrained defense mechanisms shape language use during interrogations, underscoring the need to consider the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of such interactions in Nigerian society.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis reveals that the suspect's confession is marked by deliberate violations of Grice's Maxims, particularly those of truthfulness, quantity, and relevance. These linguistic strategies are employed to minimize personal guilt, deflect responsibility, and align the narrative with culturally resonant themes. For instance, the recurring invocation of "the devil's work" demonstrates how language can serve as a tool for psychological evasion and manipulation during interrogations. This clause not only shifts blame to an external force but also invokes a cultural framework that resonates with both the speaker and the audience, thereby softening the perception of culpability. The teacher's plea further illustrates a calculated use of language to influence perceptions in the interrogation setting. By managing guilt and deflecting responsibility, the suspect strategically navigates the high-stakes interaction, leveraging culturally embedded narratives to appeal to the interrogator's potential biases. This aligns with the thematic focus of "Officer, it's the devil's work," where language functions as both a defensive mechanism and a reflection of cultural beliefs.

On the whole, the findings highlight the complex role of language in mediating guilt, cultural norms, and institutional power dynamics during police-suspect interactions. Pragmatic and discourse analyses, supported by criminological literature, suggest that such utterances are not merely defensive but are also deeply rooted in cultural narratives. These statements often serve to shield the individual's identity from direct blame while maintaining coherence within their cultural and psychological context.

Summary and Conclusion

The paper underscores the pivotal role of language in shaping police-suspect interrogations, particularly through the lens of Grice's Maxims of communication. It explores how suspects strategically employ pragmatic defense tactics—such as denial and mitigation—often drawing upon cultural and religious frameworks, like invoking spiritual explanations "It's the Devil's work", as a means of managing power imbalances during interrogations. These defence strategies align with Grice's Maxim of Relevance, as suspects invoke what they perceive as contextually relevant explanations to shift the focus away from personal guilt, thereby deflecting suspicion.

The Maxim of Quantity also comes into play, with suspects providing just enough information to avoid direct incrimination while maintaining ambiguity. In adhering to the Maxim of Manner, suspects often present their defense in a manner designed to reduce the psychological pressure of interrogation, using familiar cultural and religious language that both reinforces their innocence and serves to confuse or disarm the interrogator. The Maxim of Quality is subtly negotiated here, as the suspect's invocation of religious or spiritual explanations, while not necessarily verifiable, taps into culturally accepted truths that are not intended to deceive but to align with the expectations of their audience, the interrogators. These strategies are not simply attempts to evade guilt; they are also tactics to manage the psychological pressures of the interrogation process and, importantly, shift the burden of proof back to law enforcement.

The study reinforces the need for a detailed understanding of the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of such interactions. Recognizing these dimensions can enhance interrogation practices by helping law enforcement distinguish between culturally motivated expressions of guilt and genuine attempts at evasion. This calls for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from pragmatics, discourse analysis, criminology, and cultural studies to better understand the interplay of language, culture, and psychology in legal and institutional settings.

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APPENDIX 1

Crime/offence: kidnapping
Suspect: XXXXX (name withheld)
Victim: Neighbour's wife and her 8-months old baby
Place of crime: Adamawa State

Man confesses to organizing the kidnap of his neighbour and her 8-months old baby in Adamawa One XXXXXX (name withheld) a.k.a Mallam, confessed to have connived with a syndicate of kidnappers from Taraba and Adamawa to kidnap his neighbour XXXXX (name withheld) and her 8 months old son. XXXXXX (name withheld) a trusted neighbour to one XXXXX (name withheld) a resident in Yulde Pate, Yola South Local Government Area of Adamawa State, made the confession in Yola while he was being paraded by Adamawa Commissioner of Police, CP Olubenga Adeyanju at the command headquarters on Wednesday, September 16. According to him, he was approached by a herdsman named XXXX (name withheld) to strike the deal, saying that XXXX's brother (name withheld) who is a top government official in the state will pay millions of naira as ransom.

XXXX (name withheld) admitted that the family of Aliyu has been good to him and blamed the act on the devil. "Honestly, I don't know them and I don't know where they have taken them to. All they say was that they will give me money and it was sixty thousand naira of the one million ten thousand naira they collected as ransom. I'm pleading for Mercy, **it's the work of the devil, I don't really know what has come over me,**" he confessed. Narrating his ordeals, XXXX (name withheld) said he feels bad that XXXX (name withheld) who he had always perceived as a good neighbour could do such thing to his family. "The ugly experience of the fateful day of 11th July 2020 can't be erased in his mind, the kidnappers actually stormed my house to search for me," he said.

Credit: lindaikojisblog.com

Details in: <https://m.lindaikojisblog.com/2020/9/its-the-work-of-the-devil-man-confesses-to-organizing-the-kidnap-of-his-neighbour-and-her-8-months-old-baby-in-adamawa.html>

APPENDIX 2

Crime/Offence: Rape
Suspect: Class Teacher
Victim: School pupil
Place of the crime: Osogbo, Oyo State

At the police station, the teacher pleaded, "Please, spare me; **I didn't know what came over me.** The effect of what I did just dawned on me. I did not rape them. I only had sex with them. **It's the devil's work.**" But the proprietress of the school, Mrs. XXXX (name withheld) denied insinuations by neighbours that the teacher was notorious for sleeping

with minors. Alao said XXXXX (name withheld) was perceived as a religious and diligent person and nobody suspected that he could commit such a crime. Explaining that her children also attend the school, XXXXX (name withheld) said she would not have tolerated such a crime if she knew XXXXX (name withheld) was doing it. The proprietress said she was unaware of the tutorials organised by XXXXX (name withheld) saying that only one of the two affected girls is a pupil of her school, while the other only attended XXXX'X (name withheld) tutorials. Both girls were taken to police clinic at XXXXX (name withheld), Osogbo, where a medical officer attended to them. The medical officer, who chose to be anonymous, said the teacher did not penetrate the vaginas of the girls, adding that his organ, however, had an impact on their pubic areas. Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Mr. Taiwo Olugbemileke, said the case would be investigated since it had been reported to the police.

Credit: African news hungry Blogspot

Details in: <https://africannewshungary.blogspot.com/2010/09/bizarre-stories.html?m=1>

APPENDIX 3

Crime/offence: Causing Grievous Hurt

Suspect: Victim's Mother (name withheld)

Victim: Suspect's daughter (name withheld)

Place of crime: Adamawa

A woman residing in Lagos state, has **blamed the devil** for using her after she poured boiling water on her 13-year-old daughter's body in the Ilupeju area of the state on Tuesday July 30th. Identified as Mrs XXXX (name withheld), the woman accused her daughter, XXXX (name withheld), of stealing N500. While interrogating her, the girl denied the allegation and was attempting to walk out on Mrs XXXX (name withheld) when she lifted the boiling water from the cooker and poured on her daughter's body. XXXX (name withheld) sustained serious burns on her back and buttocks. She was rushed to the Gbagada General Hospital where she is currently being treated. Activist Harrison Gwamnishu in a chat with LIB, said Mrs XXXX (name withheld) is currently being detained at the Ilupeju Police station and will be charged to court this morning August 2nd, for grievous harm on her daughter. XXXX (name withheld) told LIB that when the mother was interrogated, Mrs XXXX (name withheld) **blamed the devil for using her to harm her daughter.**

Credit: lindaikojisblog.com

Details in: https://m.lindaikojisblog.com/2019/8/graphic-its-the-devils-work-mother-says-after-pouring-boiling-water-on-daughter-in-lagos.html#google_vignette

APPENDIX 4

A TRANSCRIPT OF POLICE -SUSPECT INTERROGATION IN DELTA STATE COMMAND

Crime/offence: Murder

Suspect: XXXXX (name withheld)

Victim: Woman (name withheld)

Place of crime: Delta State

Police: What is your name?
 Suspect: XXXX (name withheld)
 Police: XXXX who?
 Suspect: XXXX XXXX
 Police: The woman, XXXX (name withheld), who is she to you?
 Suspect: Okay, she's my friend for bakery there.
 Police: What kind of friend is she to you?
 Suspect: Sometimes I they do some kind things
 Police: Don't waste my time. What kind of friend is she to you? you get waiting you dey tell us before
 Suspect: I dey lash her
 Police: You dey lash her?
 Suspect: I dey lash her. She say make I gather money for her say she go give me but she no come give me the money
 Police: How much be the money?
 Suspect: N100,000
 Police: Oh yes continue
 Suspect: She Come vex. Early in the morning she say make I escort him* (her) go market I think saying Im go give me the money. I follow her waka go in front so I use knife chook
 Police: At what point did you stab her?
 Suspect: When she was already going.
 Police: Where, you stabbed her from back no from?
 Suspect: No, from neck
 Police: She was backing you or facing you?
 Suspect: She was not facing me, she was backing me
 Police: You stabbed her from back how many times
 Suspect: Three times
 Police: Where and where and where?
 Suspect: Neck, hand and belly
 Police: You stabbed her from neck, hand and stomach
 Suspect: Yeah
 Police: Okay, how do you feel now?
 Suspect: I say, na **devil's work**

Credit: SP Bright Edefe @Brightgoldenboy (in X.com)

<https://x.com/Brightgoldenboy/status/1787770577710702811?s=09>