Research Article

Mis/disinformation on COVID-19 in Social Media Narratives in Nigeria and Iraq: An Exploratory Investigation of their Linguistic Features from Pragmatic Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of Coronavirus 2019, known as COVID-19, has stimulated social unrest in all nations and at the same time has facilitated the spread of mis/disinformation about the pandemic in both mainstream and new media. It has also stimulated various research works that have investigated mis/disinformation on the pandemic, especially the social media narratives, through various fact-checking mechanisms. The fact-checking research that many researchers utilise to authenticate the source of this mis/disinformation about the plague focuses little or no attention on linguistic phenomena in the COVID-19 narratives in the social media discourse. The present paper, which deploys the qualitative method of analysis of information manipulation theory (IMT), investigates the linguistic features of mis/disinformation about COVID-19 from the data drawn from various social media platforms in Nigeria and Iraq. The research findings attempt to answer two research questions: Is mis/disinformation about COVID-19 detectable in the social media discourse pragmatically? Does mis/disinformation about the pandemic contains any linguistic features which language users utilise to achieve their intended communicative action? The findings, which show that IMT offers a multidimensional approach to the investigation of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19, indicate that misinformation and disinformation can be detectable from non-observation of Grice's (1989) conversational implicature principles. In rendering a pragmatic explanation for why certain social media narratives on COVID-19 mis/disinform, the study findings reveal that there are linguistic features in the misinformed and disinformed contents that aid the manipulation of information to give partial information or prevent the eventuality in which the information content can be tagged as a total lie.

Keywords: Misinformation, Disinformation, COVID-19, Information manipulation theory

1. Introduction

The outbreak of Coronavirus 2019, known as COVID-19, not only disrupted the sense of normality across the globe but has also stimulated investigations of how both mainstream and new media narratives facilitate the spread of mis/disinformation about the pandemic. (Charteris-Black, 2021; Bedu and Thamer, 2022). It is a fact that the rapid spread of mis/disinformation on COVID-19 has attracted the attention of public and academic researchers, as such mis/disinformation in social media feeds and other online social networks increases anxiety and social unrest among people across the globe. In Iraq for instance, the country's media regulator, the Communications and Media Commission (CMC), suspended Reuters' license to operate in Iraq for three months and fined them 25 million Iraqi dinars ($21,000). They accused the agency of risking public safety and jeopardising efforts to contain the pandemic. This and many similar actions by the Nigerian authorities therefore call for this research to mitigate the negative impact of misinformation and disinformation in COVID-19 narratives in social media.

In media discourse literature, misinformation and disinformation are terms which are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to false, deceptive or misleading messages spread under the guise of truthful and informative content (Guess & Lyon, 2020).

Various studies that investigate information on COVID-19 show instances in which mis/disinformation about COVID-19 is deliberately propagated through social media and social networks in Nigeria, especially regarding the scale of the pandemic and its origin, diagnosis and treatment (ARN, 2021). It is revealing that many of these works are devoted to authenticating the source of this mis/disinformation on the plague in social media narratives, while little or no attention is focused on bringing out the linguistic features of the misinformed and disinformed contents of the COVID-19 discourse (Katermina & Yachenko, 2020; Chen et. al., 2021).

Research on traditional communication establishes that smoke carries natural information about fire (Ibrahim and Sulaiman, 2020). This logical assumption postulates that all forms of information about social issues must also contain certain coded features in linguistic forms from the sender(s) and pass their intentional idea(s) to the recipient(s), who can infer some sense from the message (Bedu, 2017). The main concern of this paper is the investigation of these linguistic features from a pragmatic perspective to unravel the characteristic and pragmatic features of mis/disinformation in the social media discourse on COVID-19.

Important questions that beg for answers in this study are whether mis/disinformation about COVID-19 is detectable in the social media discourse pragmatically, and whether mis/disinformation about the pandemic contains any linguistic indication that language users utilise to achieve their intended communicative action(s). In this regard, the paper examines social media stories from Nigeria and Iraq to establish the pragmatic patterns of mis/disinformation about COVID-19 in the narrative social media discourse of COVID-19

2. Literature Review

An emerging body of research (Starbird, Arif, & Wilson, 2019; Wilson & Starbird, 2020; Guess & Lyon, 2020) has shown that mis/disinformation often deploys words differently than truth-tellers do in the social media discourse. Social media therefore becomes a very useful tool for disinformation, as many language users take advantage of the ubiquitous presence of new media, which gives their disinformation more visibility beyond the reach of authentic information.

According to Jack (2017), misinformation and disinformation are terms refer to information that is inaccurate, incorrect or misleading. But what separates disinformation from misinformation is intent. Jack (2017) states that **misinformation** is information whose inaccuracy is unintentional, while **disinformation** is information that is deliberately false or misleading.

Until now, the majority of researchers working on mis/disinformation about COVID-19 who labelled the phenomena an 'infodemic' employed source-driven processes that relied on computational approaches (Cinelli et. al. 2020). The researchers utilised computerised text analysis such as viral news tracking websites, fact-checking websites and Open-Source intelligence (OSINT) to not only identify but expose disinformation and misinformation around COVID-19 (Chen et. al. 2021).

The research utilising computerised efforts against disinformation narratives and social media discourse related to COVID-19 (especially the fact checking mechanism that checks media bias) and its findings tend to be inadequate in their descriptions and explanations. The findings only attempted to classify information about the pandemic as coming from questionable or reliable sources on various social media platforms. The research classified COVID-19 social media contents and their sources based on the truthfulness and bias of the information published. It grouped COVID-19-related information into two categories: either associated with reliable or questionable contents.

These research findings show that users on the most popular social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) are less susceptible to misinformation than users on less regulated social media platforms, such as Gab and Reddit, which spread information about the pandemic from questionable sources. Moreover, fact-checking mechanisms are usually constrained, as they require human expertise to verify the claims obtained from dataset retrieval and, to some degree of generalisation, it can be difficult to hypothesise the characteristic of mis/disinformation using such approaches (Chen et al., 2015).

Despite this recognition, most of these researchers pay little or no attention to the linguistic features in the content of these messages, which directly affects people's behaviour and the effectiveness of the various countermeasures deployed by governments against the pandemic.

The other research approach that attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of the social dynamics of information related to COVID-19 is Natural Language Processing techniques. In this approach, researchers utilise techniques to investigate words embedded in the text corpus of

each platform, i.e., they develop a word vector representation in which words sharing common contexts are in close proximity. Moreover, by running clustering procedures on these vector representations, they separate groups of words and topics that are perceived as more relevant to the COVID-19 debate. Debates range from comparisons to other viruses and requests for God's blessing, to racism, while the largest volume of interaction is related to lock-downs, precaution measures and mobilisation of people to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Words and linguistic styles in all media narratives, including that of social media, played a critical role in shaping the audience's attitudes and opinions. Mis/disinformation about COVID-19, which has wide-raging negative implications, especially an increase in the public health risk, can contain certain linguistic features that would help in persuading people to embrace wrong ideas or impressions about COVID-19.

From linguistic points of views, mis/disinformation is a fabricated piece of information intentionally designed to deceive an audience (Wahl-Jorgensen, et al., 2016). In this regard, scholars such as Linden, Lasorsa and Lewis (2009) treat mis/disinformation as deceptive information, which they compare to trustworthy news. According to their content analysis, deceptive news articles are typically organised to mis/disinform in the form of much longer text than trustworthy articles, and they contain more direct quotations in an effort to persuade their audience to accept their account.

Analysing the characteristics of misinformation spreading during the COVID-19 outbreak in China, Chen et. al. (2021) deploy descriptive analysis to classify COVID-19 misinformation into six types: (1) rumour, (2) no ultimate conclusion, (3) inaccuracy, (4) fake scientific knowledge, (5) dependent on the situation, and (6) fake news. The respective meanings of the six types are shown in Table 1 (adopted from Chen et al. (2021, p. 1872)):

Table 1: Classification of Misinformation Related to COVID-19 in China

Type	Description	Example
Rumor	In this data, the term of rumor is used to represent completely fake news or messages that have been verified by government or expert.	The unknown pneumonia in Wuhan is the SARS virus.
No ultimate conclusion (controversial conclusion)	This type is almost equal to Swire-Thompson and Lazer's definition that the message has not proven by the scientific community, and blindly following such messages may be ineffective or harmful.	Lopinavir/ritonavir can effectively remedy COVID-19.
Inaccuracy	The original or a part of the content of the message is genuine or factual; however, the final version of the message is processed or distorted.	If a disinfectant's name involves chlorine, it is a chlorine-containing disinfectant.
Fake scientific knowledge (fake common knowledge)	The message has been proven wrong by the scientific community.	Fireworks can prevent the epidemic.
Dependent on the situation	Such a message is factual only in specific situations.	N95 masks should be changed every four hours.
Fake news	Created news for attracting clicks and followers, or for entertainment purposes.	Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was confirmed as having COVID-19.

Chen et al. (2021) illustrate that the creation and spread of misinformation related to a public health emergency have a thematic focus, cultural and social factors, and a developmental process. The study recommends that targeted and effective management strategies for responding to misinformation on social media be used to tackle the current COVID-19 outbreak across the world and provide lessons for future health risk communication and misinformation research.

However, some of the COVID-19 pandemic discourse researchers attempt to evaluate meaning-making in the media narratives from the appraisal framework that widely regarded the linguistic phenomenon as the interpersonal metafunction of language (Bedu and Thamer, 2022). These researchers identify the fact that language users in COVID-19 discourse across various communities in Iraq express an attitude of affection, as shown below:

> 1. On a sad note, unlike many developed countries around the world, the Iraqi health care service that was once an envy of Middle Eastern nations cannot adequately test its citizens for the coronavirus pandemic nor does it have the capacity to treat large numbers of the sick and dying. (adopted from Bedu and Thamer, 2022: 164)

The excerpt in (1) above indicates the language user's attitude of affection for the good infrastructure and effective system of governance that Iraq had some years back, and that the language user thinks that for tackling emerging challenges like the COVID-19 plague, the country needs critical health facilities and the latest technology to deal with the pandemic.

In regards to the pragmatic aspect of communication, all discourses contain different pragmatic behaviours in form of informative and communicative intentions (Sperber, 2000). These two forms of intentions of discourse(s) are the catalysts to guarantee true and useful information or otherwise (mis/disinformation) in human communication. Grice's (1975, 1978, 1989) conversation maxims prescribe how senders of communication contribute true and useful information within the context in which a discourse event occurs and help their receivers to infer how true information (or otherwise) is being communicated. This is captured in the 'cooperative principle', and its four 'conversation maxims' to which discourse participants are said to adhere is shown below:

1. Maxim of quality
Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
    i. Do not say what you believe to be false.
    ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

2. Maxim of quantity
    i. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).
    ii. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

3. Maxim of relation
Make your contribution relevant.

4. Maxim of manner
Be perspicuous, specially:
     i. Avoid obscurity of expression
     ii. Avoid ambiguity.
     iii. Be brief.
     iv. Be orderly.

It is obvious that by maintaining these maxims, the initiator of discourse is acting in the interest of providing his or her audience with relevant and reliable information in a way that is easy to understand. Owing to these principles, mis/disinformation can be detected pragmatically from the cooperative action of the communication of senders towards their receivers. In this circumstance, the editorial text-consumers/readers will give their attention to relevant stimuli in the editorial discourse.

Numerous studies also indicate that misrepresentation, distortion and mis/disinformation are tendencies of violation of Grice's maxims in every discourse (Bedu, 2017). For example, newspaper editorials are typically characterised by various forms of misrepresentation, omission, evasion and euphemism, which can all be seen as a violation of Grice's maxims (Chilton 2004). Let us see how this works in the following example (2) taken from a USA Today newspaper editorial.

2.   **10 reasons to be thankful: our view**
As Americans gather for Thanksgiving, there's plenty to worry about, from Islamic State terrorists to a warming planet <u>to big stores that can't keep your credit card numbers **safe from Russian hackers**</u>.
But just one day, forget all that, and focus instead on some of the positive trends that too often get over looked. Here are 10:… (*USA Today*, November 26, 2014) (adopted from Bedu, 2017, p. 79)

In example (2) above, in the underlined sentence the writer misrepresents the issue by particularising and attributing the hacking of American credit card numbers to Russians, knowing that internet banking fraud has no border or nationality. Such a construction is a typical form of disinformation that clearly violates or flouts the maxim of quality. Similarly, the issue of omission violates the maxim of quantity, and evasion violates the maxim of relation. These violations can all lead to mis/disinformation about human events like COVID-19.

From the above discussion, the paper is set to utilise the information manipulation theory (IMT) that is heavily influenced by Grice's cooperative principle to investigate linguistic features and their effect on meaning-making in mis/disinformation about COVID-19.

3. Information Manipulation Theory

Information manipulation theory (IMT) is a pragmatic theory that is primarily concerned with systematic uses of language, as opposed to structure (McCornack, 1992). Pragmatics sees language use not only as a particular type of social action but as a form of cooperative dialogic discourse (Bedu, 2017). Based upon Grice's (1989) theory of conversational implicature, the theoretical assumptions of information manipulation theory are aimed at reconciling the competing goals of conveying information that the conversational partners are entitled to and minimising the damage that the conveyed information might cause. In this sense, the proponents of the theory are interested primarily in identifying and reconciling the ways in which sensitive information is manipulated and controlled by language users through the violation of conversation maxims and the cooperative principle (Grice, 1989).

The theoretical principles of information manipulation theory therefore postulate that manipulated and controlled messages are unique from other forms of discourse in that they involve deviations from what can be considered rational and cooperative conversational behaviour (McCornack, 1992). According to this theory, in all ongoing conversations, manipulated and controlled messages mislead recipients of the messages by covertly violating the principles that underlie and guide conversational understanding, like the maxims of quantity, quality, manner, and relevance of information (Bowers et al., 1977; Grice, 1989).

This research finds the IMT principles suitable to handling issues of mis/disinformation about COVID-19, as misleading information can arise from varying the *amount* of information that is disclosed, the *distortion* of information, the use of conventionally *ambiguous* phrases, and/or varying the *relevance* of the information that is presented in the social media discourse.

4. Source of Data and Methodology of Analysis

Misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 and the negative consequences of such disinformation, in that it inhibits efforts to arrest the plague, have attracted worldwide attention and dedicated fact-checking efforts to counter mis/disinformation in social media. In this study, the primary source of data was 10 social media posts related to COVID-19 issues that were extracted from archived data of Twitter, YouTube and online newspaper platforms, each whose users are Nigerians and Iraqis in equal proportion. The collected data were retrieved from social media using an all-inclusive blind search. The phrase COVID-19 + <Country name> was used to search on new media platforms. The COVID-19 narratives that were retrieved from various platforms were used without the consent of the users because the data were freely accessible and labelled in the 'public' category of both media platforms and therefore, already in the public space and open to public scrutiny. However, to guarantee their privacy, names and images that could reveal the identities of the social media users or individuals and groups were concealed.

This paper is a qualitative content analysis exploring the pragmatic patterns and language of mis/disinformation about COVID-19. The qualitative method helps to evaluate the pragmatic cues of misinformation and disinformation in social media narratives on COVID-19. The goal here is to examine the different ways in which language users in the narratives of social media manipulate pragmatic features in the production of deceptive messages in the form of misinformation and disinformation. In doing so, the deployment of the qualitative method is not used for presenting but for describing and discussing the range of pragmatic features of mis/disinformation about COVID-19 in the social media discourse.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

Working within the principles of Grice's cooperative principle, Bowers et al. (1977) explain that language users, in trying to misinform or disinform, are covertly violating the principles that underlie and guide conversational understanding of the discourse to mislead their audience. In such instances, Metts (1989) further explains, language users with the intent to mislead their audience code messages embedded with truthful but irrelevant information while presenting their messages. This assumption can be seen in the excerpt (2) below:

3. COVID-19 VACCINATION: SOKOTO WOMEN DISCOURAGED BY KANO MENINGITIS EXPERIENCE
Today, 25 years after the ugly experience of the 1996 trial of Trovan by a pharmaceutical company – Pfizer Inc. The hurting memory is yet to be erased from the consciousness of an average Nigerian, and this seems to have continued to haunt even genuine efforts towards addressing some health concerns.
In Sokoto, a North-western state like Kano, the fears are that the latest victim could be from the ongoing vaccination against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as some residents who spoke to this reporter have declined to take the highly recommended jabs against the rampaging virus.

In (3) above, the writer brings together two different events. The underlined sentence in the first paragraph about the 1996 trial of the meningitis vaccine 'Trovan' in Kano provides background in the form of the 'recall method' (in the sense of Metts (1989)) to manipulate truthful information in order to disinform the audience on the efficacy of the recommended jabs against the rampaging coronavirus. The proposition of the recall method, despite its truthful nature as an event, is the violation of relevance in information, since meningitis and the coronavirus are two different pandemics. This goes against the guidelines for the effective and efficient use of language in conversation spelt out by the maxim of relation (Grice, 1989).

In addition to the recall method, language users often utilise generic nouns to stand for the actors while trying to manipulate discourse for misinformation and disinformation purposes. Consider the following example in (4):

4. Soaring Cases of Covid-19 in Iraq

One doctor working at a hospital in Baghdad established by the health ministry to work with Covid-19, said he had seen nearly 1,000 patients suffering from the virus in the hospital.

He spoke on condition of anonymity, as a result of recent measures imposed by the ministry to prevent health workers from speaking to the media.

"The truth is the pressure is very high and the number of patients is increasing - but we are determined to overcome the ordeal," he told Middle East Eye.

He said the hospital was stretched to capacity in efforts to cope with the number of new patients.

"Frankly, there is no safe distance between patients due to the small size of the rooms," he said.

In (4) above, there is a violation of maxims due to non-observance of the maxim of manner as the article attempts to mis/disinform audience by withholding references through omission of the agent. The same thing happens in the data from the Nigerian social media user shown below in (5):

5. Several Clerics, especially from the Pentecostal community, also protested against government Covid 19 measures, especially the continued closure of churches and other places of worship even as the general lockdown was being relaxed.

Once such cleric is Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the President and Founder of Christ Embassy, a leading Pentecostal church in Nigeria who has persistently and from the outset used misinformation to advance his anti- Covid conspiracies.

Pastor Chris as he is popularly called by his teeming admirers and church members, has blatantly denied the existence of the Covid 19 virus describing it as the biggest deception ever. For example, following the government March 30 nationwide lockdown as a result of rising Covid 19 infection rates, Pastor Chris had alleged then in a sermon that the lockdown was imposed in order to keep citizens indoors while 5G cables were laid. He stressed that citizens needed to be kept indoors to prevent protests against the installation of the 5G network.

In the same sermon, he also claimed that 5G technology and not Covid 19 was responsible for the deaths recorded in Wuhan China, since China is one of the countries in the lead in building and deploying the 5G technology.

In the underlined sentences in the third paragraph in (5), the text indicates that the pastor claimed that 5G cables were laid but that he ideologically concealed the reference of the agent (mobile telecommunications company) responsible for the installation or deployment of the 5G network in the country. Such syntactic structure is a typical violation of the maxim of manner, which urges language users to avoid obscurity of expression.

Apart from concealment, which falls within the violation of manner, falsification is another pragmatic strategy in misinforming and disinforming people about COVID-19, where language users assert information that is contradictory to the true information about the virus and its treatment to achieve their intentional communication purposes, as seen in (6) and (7) below:

6. In a video interview published on 12th, July 2020 on YouTube which has been viewed over three hundred and seventy-five thousand times, Okotie described COVID-19 vaccine as satanic. He said "What Bill Gates is doing under the auspices of the United Nations is to make sure that you receive the Food, the GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms). <u>When you eat that Genetically Modified Food that you eat and you take the vaccine, you have entered into communion with Satan, Lucifer. And that communion involves blood</u>.

   Now, since the blood of Jesus is not what is talking about, or what he has to offer, he will require you to seek blood somewhere else. And the only place where you can find blood is in another human being. So, <u>one of the things that the vaccine will make you do is to become a vampire who needs to drink blood for sustenance</u>. But we, as Christians, we don't drink the blood, we drink wine; which is an emblem of the blood and that sustains us spiritually. But his communion will require you drinking blood consistently so that you are a vampire for your sustenance."

7. **Iraq reports first cases of Omicron variant**

   Iraq has identified more than five cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant, the health ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

   Five infected persons were from the northern city of Duhok, in Iraqi Kurdistan, the statement said.

   More cases have been reported among foreign diplomats in Baghdad, the ministry said <u>without elaborating on the number of cases.</u>

   Coronavirus infections have significantly decreased in recent months helped by rising numbers of vaccinated people. (Reuters 6 January 2022)

The underlined claims and their propositions in the first and second paragraphs in (6) and (7) above indicate that eating genetically modified food and getting the COVID-19 vaccine are manipulated information to misinform and disinform the audience. The underlined claims in the two excerpts violate the maxim of quality, which relates to discourse expectations regarding the veracity of information.

However, it has equally been noticed in the data that misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 are manipulated information that violates the maxim of quantity regarding the amount of information that should be provided within a message. Consider the following excerpt in (5):

8. A viral video shared on multiple social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups in Nigeria, claimed that the consumption of raw onions and garlic was capable of treating coronavirus (COVID-19). Based on the unproven claim, the virus would die once the vegetables – onions and garlic- were consumed as smoothies.

   The other interesting part of the claim was the advice to the Nigerian public to slice the onions or garlic and place them at the corners of individuals' homes.

In (8) above, the language user purposefully violates the maxim of quantity to produce and present issues on COVID-19 medication and prevention in the first and second paragraphs without any scientific backing or validation. Manipulations of quantity in the above excerpt

are what rendered the proposition of the information 'deceptive' to mislead the audience.

The misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19, in some instances, are not limited to the violation of one maxim, as they involve violation of several maxims by manipulating quantity, quality, manner and relevance within a given discourse. The combination of several violations in one message gives rise to what Matt and Chronis (1986) called half-truth discourse. Consider the following tweet in example (9):

> I've warned about the dangers of the vaccine that will be proposed as the answer to #COVID 19. This will result in millions of deaths. Nig. Is trying to pass a law that will make it compulsory to take that vaccine as part of the world depopulation agenda. This is EVIL! #stopncdcbill

In the above example, the information contains a continuum of covert to overt misrepresentation of information, in which the language user in the tweet manipulates the information in several different ways, resulting in messages that were perceived as significantly deceptive to misinform and disinform the audience. The misinformation and disinformation are achieved through manipulations of quality ('**I've warned about the dangers of the vaccine that will be proposed as the answer to #COVID-19.**') since the author of the tweet is not a scientist and lacks the moral right and authority to warn the government or the public against taking the vaccine. Similarly, the author manipulates the maxim of quantity and relation to ensure clarity that are the baseline for "honest" information. The information in the tweet fails to adequately educate the audience and substantiate the relationship between COVID-19 vaccines and the human reproductive system or world demography to establish his alleged claim of a '**world depopulation agenda**'.

6. Finding and Discussion

The findings in the data analysis show that IMT offers a multidimensional approach to the investigation of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 by integrating Grice's (1989) theory of conversational implicature. The finding further indicates that the violations of quality involve the falsification of information in social media narratives on the pandemic. While the violations of quantity can result in lies of omission (deliberate masking of the responsible agent), the research findings show that the violations of multiple maxims (i.e., quality, quantity, relevance and manner) within a given discourse result in social media narratives on COVID-19 that are half-truth discourse, which is functionally synonymous with misinformation, disinformation and deception.

In rendering a pragmatic explanation for why certain social media narratives on COVID-19 mis/disinform, the study reveals that the mis/disinformation about the pandemic arises from covert or overt violations of one or more of Grice's four maxims (quality, quantity, relevance and manner) by the language users, and the violations may not necessarily be visible to the audience of the social media.

In this regard, all misinformation and disinformation issues emanating from the violation of one or more of Grice's conversational maxims can be detected by the consumers of social media. From the discussions in the data analysis, the study discovers that language users misinform and disinform in all discourse when they fail to adhere to one or more Cooperative Principles and their maxims, as illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2: The criteria of violation of maxims used in misinformation and disinformation discourse		
Maxim	**Violating the maxims**	**Examples**
Quantity	• If the speaker uses circumlocution or does not get to the point • If the speaker is uninformative • If the speaker talks too little • If the speaker talks too much • If the speaker repeats certain words	Manipulation by violating the maxim of quantity, as there is no scientific information in the narrative, as shown below: *A viral video shared on multiple social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups in Nigeria, claimed that the consumption of raw onions and garlic was capable of treating coronavirus (COVID-19). Based on the unproven claim, the virus would die once the vegetables – onions and garlic- were consumed as smoothies.*
Quality	• If the speaker lies or says something that is believed to be false • If the speaker is ironic or makes ironic and sarcastic statement • If the speaker denies something • If the speaker distorts information	Manipulation of truth by embedding COVID-19 narratives with truthful but irrelevant information, as in the following: *COVID-19 VACCINATION: SOKOTO WOMEN DISCOURAGED BY KANO MENINGITIS EXPERIENCE <u>Today, 25 years after the ugly experience of the 1996 trial of Trovan by a pharmaceutical company – Pfizer Inc…….</u> In Sokoto, a North-western state like Kano, the fears are that the latest victim could be from the ongoing vaccination against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)…*

Relevant	• If the speaker makes conversation that doesn't match the topic • If the speaker changes the conversation topic abruptly • If the speaker avoids talking about something • If the speaker hides something or hides a fact • If the speaker has the wrong causality	Manipulation by creating half-truth discourse through multiple violations of maxims, including that of relevancy, as seen below: *I've warned about the dangers of the vaccine that will be proposed as the answer to #COVID 19. This will result in millions of deaths. Nig. Is trying to pass a law that will make it compulsory to take that vaccine as part of the world depopulation agenda. This is EVIL! #stopncdcbill*
Manner	• If the speaker uses ambiguous language • If the speaker exaggerates • If the speaker uses slang when addressing people who do not understand it • If the speaker's voice is not loud enough	Masking the actor by omitting his name is clear manipulation, as illustrated below: *Soaring Cases of COVID-19 in Iraq* **One doctor** *working at a hospital in Baghdad established by the health ministry to work with COVID-19, said he had seen nearly 1,000 patients suffering from the virus in the hospital.* **He spoke on condition of anonymity**…
		(Grice, 1975, p. 45)

7. Conclusion

The phenomena of misinformation and disinformation are not novel concepts in academic literature. The research findings in this paper prove that mis/disinformation are information that, by nature, is designed to mislead the consumers of such information. The paper also, in its discoveries, highlights that there are linguistic features in the misinformed and disinformed contents that aid the manipulation of information to give partial information or prevent the eventuality in which the information content can be tagged as a total lie.

In conclusion, the study recommends that the issue of pragmatic study of both the mainstream and new media discourse would improve the understanding of the violation of maxims specifically for misinformation and disinformation purposes, so that people would critically understand what is behind one's utterances and their underlying motives.

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