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## Breaking Silence: A Pragmatic Analysis of Grice's Maxim of Quantity in the Disability Discourse of Sara Nović's *True Biz*

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### ABSTRACT

The current study explores the application of Grice's Maxim of Quantity in Sara Nović's *True Biz* to investigate linguistic and identity conflict in and around the Deaf community. The study highlights how language acts as both a limit, and capacity for independence in Deaf-hearing interactions, using qualitative textual analysis through Gricean pragmatics and disability discourse. Moreover, the study demonstrates how omissions of direct speech and vagueness in dialogue indicate deeper systemic issues of exclusion, stigma, and negotiation of identity for Deaf individuals. For example, through interactions between February Waters, an adult hearing character, and Charlie, a Deaf child character, communication goes awry not simply as a matter of spoken or written words but is ultimately grounded in more complex structural inequalities. The findings also connect to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals focused on equitable education and reduced inequalities for Deaf individuals. Ultimately, the novel *True Biz* engages and reflects upon the social and psychological consequences of communicatively deprived entanglements in the Deaf community and emphasises the need to rethink Deaf identity and share accessibility practices. This research adds to interdisciplinary scholarship and extends discourse analysis to disability studies by analysing the complexity of identity, communication, and differences in positions of power in marginalised and under-resourced communities.

**Keywords:** Grice's Maxim of Quantity; Disability Representation; *True Biz*; Conversational Norms; Deaf Identity; Communication Breakdown

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## 1. Introduction

As a basic human ability, communication reaches beyond words to include cultural frameworks, social situations, and interpersonal relationships that develop social identities. People with disabilities who belong to Deaf communities create their identities while establishing resistance through language usage. Understanding Grice's maxims requires swift analysis because their application reveals new meanings when we study the firsthand experiences within the Deaf community. Miscommunication and linguistic marginalisation exist beyond interpersonal issues since these exclusions affect students' educational opportunities, identity evolution, and psychological state<sup>[1]</sup>.

Linguistic researchers use Grice's Cooperative Principle's quantity maxim to evaluate communication effectiveness since this maxim states that one should give the required information without excess<sup>[2]</sup>. The concept of maxims in communication theory, especially the maxim of Quantity, requires further examination regarding their function in linguistic interaction within marginalised Deaf speech communities that use the unique language of American Sign Language (ASL)<sup>[3]</sup>. These violations exist beyond accidents because they seem like structural barriers alongside social prejudices stemming from dominant communication norms<sup>[4]</sup>.

Modern-day studies recognise the necessity for reviewing traditional linguistic principles after their application to disabled persons' narratives and minor language speakers<sup>[5]</sup>. Research on disability discourse demonstrates that language maintains stereotypes and transforms human identities into deficient components while producing symbolic abuse toward disabled people<sup>[6, 7]</sup>. Inside Deaf communities, there exists ongoing linguistic discrimination through mainstream politics and oralism, which keeps signed languages subordinate to the official language. Modern scholars advocate for establishing sign languages as natural languages that maintain independent cultural and educational value in their demand to abolish media and educational assumptions about ability<sup>[8–10]</sup>.

In this situation, the narrative landscape of *True Biz* by Sara Nović provides an important space to consider how breaches of communicative norms, particularly breaches of Grice's maxim of Quantity, manifest the broader failures of social neglect and misrepresentation of the Deaf. Set in River Valley School for the Deaf, the novel foregrounds the biographical circumstances of Deaf students and instructors

who are entangled in experiences of linguistic dislocation, cultural erasure, and structural invisibility. The representations of interactions between Deaf characters and the hearing universe produce particular insight regarding the deferential effects of breakdowns in communication—not solely interpersonally, but in altercating structural or emotional<sup>[11]</sup>. It is a literary artefact that registers how linguistic norms evolved as communicative realities present themselves and challenges normative narratives concerning normalcy, access, and intelligibility<sup>[12]</sup>.

Though previous studies have considered the application of Gricean theory in various literary contexts<sup>[13]</sup>, research has not thoroughly considered how these theories can function as a disability narrative, particularly about Deaf literature. Throughout the previous studies, intersections across disciplines, particularly linguistic disability studies and literary analysis, are left under-theorised. These theoretical joints may create richer insights into the complexity of communicative marginality. This gap demonstrates a need for a systematic examination of *True Biz*'s construction of linguistic norms through the lens of dis/ability studies to show how language manifests as an enabling and constraining feature of identity-making, belonging, and educational inclusion.

In this context, the current investigation will fill the research gap by using Grice's maxim of Quantity to choose a method to co-analyse *True Biz* with Deaf epistemology and disability studies discourse. The study leverages the novel as a productive mechanism for pedagogical inclusion and analyses the interdisciplinary realms of linguistic justice. In this regard, the paper has the following objectives:

- To explore the cases of breached or violated Maxim of Quantity in the conversations from Sara Nović's *True Biz*, and investigate the implications of these violations for understanding the pragmatic struggles in Deaf-hearing communication.
- To explore how the novel's demonstration of communication breakdown contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language use, identity, and accessibility within the context of disability discourse analysis.

## 2. Review of Literature

After establishing *True Biz* as a key literary text highlighting Deaf culture, language, and identity, it is imperative

to locate the analysis within current scholarship and theory that expands the understanding of communication dynamics in disability discourses. Within the context of scholarship that has examined how Deaf identity is represented in *True Biz*, it is valued for its nuanced representation of cultural and pedagogical realities. In a recent analysis, Skyer praised Nović for being an authentic advocate of the Deaf experience but also critiqued the author for blending fiction and nonfiction in a way that may have limited the opportunity to dwell deeper into the complexity of institutional barriers and Deaf Identity<sup>[14]</sup>.

Jassim examines how politicians adopt and manipulate these maxims to constrict and influence interpretable through contextual engagement and intent, revealing the plasticity of Gricean principles within strategic communication<sup>[15]</sup>. Wijaya reiterates the pedagogical opportunity in explaining implicature and maxim violation as capacity building and improving student communication competence<sup>[16]</sup>. Toews and Spicer highlight that understanding proverbs and figurative speech is interpreted only through a listener's understanding of Gricean norms and contextual violation<sup>[17, 18]</sup>.

While various fields have utilised Grice's framework widely, its application within disability studies—in works centered on Deaf characters—has yet to be fully developed. This study is distinct in applying Gricean maxims not solely as a linguistic tool but as a sociolinguistic lens for interpreting marginal and shared communications. For example, previous studies, such as Mushlihatin's work on *The Miracle Worker*, noted how conversational norms shape how individuals interact but did not consider the deeper implications of language and disability<sup>[19]</sup>. In a further example, Mariyam et al. consider the maxims in commercial advertising yet do not position these observed interactions to the lived experience of Deaf individuals or the broader socio-ecological systems related to accessibility and normativity<sup>[20]</sup>.

In a related investigation of disability discourse and Gricean pragmatics, Pargavi and Abirami examined *To Kill a Mockingbird* to inspect the representation of Boo Radley's disability through breaches of Grice's Maxims. The authors noted that the characters were often passing around incomplete, misleading or exaggerated information about Boo, and in doing so, they were often violating the Maxim of Quantity. These communicative operations, while incomplete and deceptive themselves, further demonstrated Boo's

symbolic othering and cultural exclusion, suggesting how language can structure stigma and misrepresentation in fictional narratives about ability and disability. This previous body of work reiterates the understanding that violations of Gricean principles in literature can serve as more than stylistic choice, but rather represents a more systemic cultural attitude about disability, silence, and boundaries in social contexts<sup>[21]</sup>.

In addition, Boukhelif et al. and Idris show how humour and domestic conversation often hinge on strategic violations of Grice's maxims in conversations constituting nuance, suggesting their implicit potential for elucidating power dynamics and exclusion in social interactions<sup>[22, 23]</sup>. These examples are important in delineating how communicative breaks in *True Biz* may be read for more than narrative structure or superfluosity; they reveal systemic issues of access, belonging, and cultural representation.

Thus, the present study fills a significant gap by bridging linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and disability studies. It interrogates how violations of conversational norms in *True Biz* mirror the social marginalisation of Deaf individuals and how these patterns reflect broader structures of linguistic injustice. The study contributes to a deeper interdisciplinary understanding of language, identity, and power by employing Gricean maxims as an analytical foundation.

### 3. Methodology

The research that H.P. Grice produced on conversational implicature developed within the established foundations of ordinary language philosophy as well as speech act theory and formal logic. Through his work he developed his ideas by incorporating Wittgenstein's concept of meaning as use and J.L. Austin's performative utterances while using Bertrand Russell's analyses of logical form and natural language. From Peirce and James' pragmatic philosophy, Grice derived his idea about how social contexts together with practical outcomes cause meaning to emerge.

The application of Grice's conversational maxims to "True Biz" analysis becomes optimal because the novel emphasizes broken Deaf-hearing communication and information protection dynamics between the two communities. The Gricean method explains how February Waters employs deliberate violations of the information norms as her way to

challenge social exclusion, while sociolinguistic research focuses on identity development independently of power systems and literary studies overlook pragmatic functions. The Maxim of Quantity helps readers discover the essential power conflicts concerning information management in the narrative because it demonstrates that Deaf character struggles with communication stemming from systemic discrimination. Through this pragmatic framework we understand how Nović's narrative shows how language serves to limit yet empower Deaf individuals in their representation.

The study examines violations of conversational maxims in Sara Nović's *True Biz* and how they illustrate the sociolinguistic tensions and identity work of Deaf people. It uses a qualitative textual analysis, grounded in Gricean pragmatics and disability discourse, to gain insight into how language operates as both a barrier and a tool for empowerment when Deaf people and hearing people communicate with one another. To analytically contextualise the current study, the research will use the framework conducted by H. P. Grice's theory that established conversational maxims. Developed in pragmatics, Grice's Cooperative Principle involves four maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner—that facilitate conversational implicature and mutual intelligibility<sup>[2]</sup>. The dialogue was purposively sampled based on three criteria: (i) it featured at least one Deaf character, (ii) it contained tension or conflict in the discourse, and (iii) it utilised linguistic features that created social marginalisation. Specifically, the 25 datasets that comprise the analysis were all identifiable dialogue in various scenarios, including classroom, home, peer, and institutional settings, to support a diversity of themes and afford themes some wider narrative context. The selected dialogues were grouped independently by researchers against a structured schema based on Grice's maxims for under and over-informing (Quantity), false explanations and unsupported claims (Quality), irrelevant responses (Relation), and ambiguous or obscure (Manner).

The second purpose was characterised by the sociocultural significance of these violations in light of the accessibility issues relating to Deaf identity and marginalisation. Thematic analysis linked each instance of maxim violations to the possibilities of miscommunication, forms of resistance, and identity promotion, relying on implicature theory to annotate meaning beyond utterances. The violations were not considered a communicative breakdown. How-

ever, the implementation of pragmatic approaches by Deaf characters to deal with institutions changed the meaning of 'knowledge'—possibility and exclusion to agenda, existential exclusion, and marginalisation changed the meaning of 'knowledge'. The analysis further added back layers of meaning through a disability studies disposition, indicating that accessible everyday language practices both mirror structural impediments and dramatise Deaf authorial agency for different kinds of meanings. By combining pragmatism and ableism, this research establishes interdisciplinary scholarship in comprehension, identity, and participation in literature.

## 4. Analysis

Grice's Maxim of Quantity, which indicates that speakers should provide the right amount of information (not too much or too little), is a useful framework for investigating the sociopragmatic tensions seen in *True Biz*. The narrative gestures towards the decrement or excess of information greatly in and around Deaf characters, especially when situating these situations under stressors such as emotion, culture, or institutions. Ultimately, the deviation from the maxims of communication pertains to the ongoing issues related to exclusion, stigma, and identity negotiation in deaf-hearing discourse. By exploring select conversational exchanges, this section demonstrates how implicature and violations of the maxim of Quantity were related to an indicative or evoked form of structural marginalisation and mediators of resistance or self-preservation strategies in Deaf-hearing communicative practices. **Figure 1** below provides an overview of the relationship between the characters in *True Biz* and their communication dynamics.

### 4.1. February Waters and the Reporters - Purposeful Omission

In a press conference about the disappearance of Deaf students, February Waters, Principal of River Valley School, repeatedly withholds information which runs counter to the Quantity maxim of Grice's Maxims to counter ableist presumptions. For example:

**Reporter:** "Do you have any worries about the welfare of the boys, given the nature of their

handicap?”

**February:** “I’m concerned for the students’ welfare, as I would be for any missing teenager” (Nović, p. 11)

February is intentionally vague, avoiding any important details that could reinforce stereotypes. The reporters framed their questions to assume that the boys’ deafness would provide enough reasoning to assume safety risk while reverting those assumptions to them through implication. February restrained information on the students to distance herself and the school from the same narrative for protection. This asserts that this is an example of under-informing as a communicative defence against a judgment from someone outside of the Deaf community. This same applied to their

questioning about cochlear implants:

**Reporter:** “Are they implanted?”

**February:** “I’m not authorised to divulge a minor’s medical history on television” (Nović, p. 11)

This reply represents an intentional withholding of personal medical information as a specific example of a purposeful violation of a Quantity maxim as an emphasis on ethical confidentiality to reject an expectation of exposure placed upon disabled people. More importantly, this is also a strategic effort to shield from scrutiny in line with results from studying oppression in disability pragmatics, in which information control was a means to resist probing external to the community.

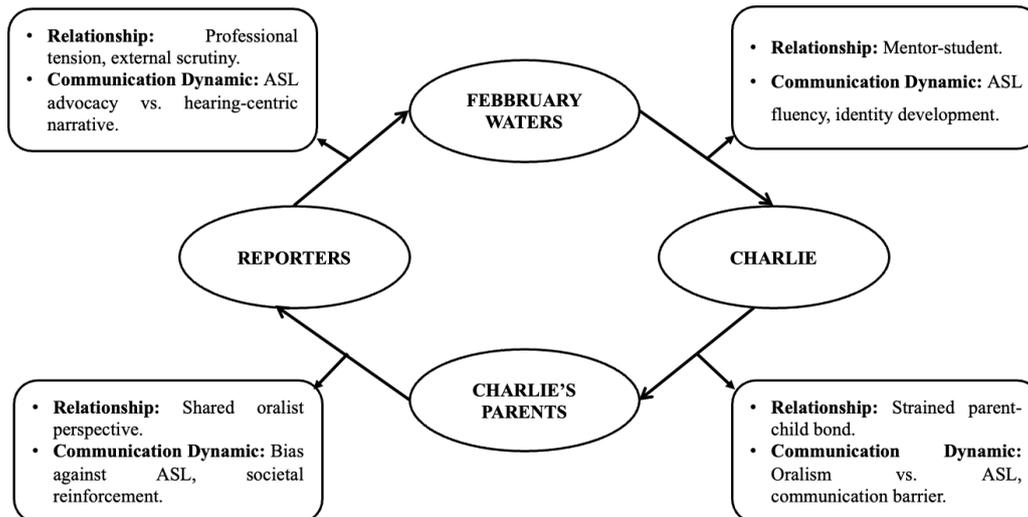


Figure 1. Communication Dynamics in *True Biz*: Character Relationships.

#### 4.2. Charlie’s Parents - A Lack of Communication and Brevity

Family exchanges about Charlie’s education show another instance of a Quantity violation (they responded instead of giving a more thorough explanation). In the conversation between Charlie’s worried mother with her father:

**Mother:** “But how will she learn sign language?”

**Father:** “We’re signed up for community classes” (Nović, p. 18)

The father’s answer lacks expansion (no elaboration about the classes, when they would take place, how to sign

up, cost, etc.). This lack of responsiveness undermines the urgency of the mother’s concern and exemplifies a context of undercommunication, common in families outside of Deaf culture or deaf needs, especially. This communication gap suggests a lack of linguistic knowledge and a disconnect of emotional involvement, which would only add to Charlie’s feeling marginalised within the home.

#### 4.3. Charlie’s ASL Challenges: Vagueness of Labels and Emotional Distress

Charlie’s struggles with ASL are often situated with vague labels, which adds to her psychological distress. Nović describes,

“She became prone to what her mother called ‘spells.’ Her teachers called them behaviours, as if any act that was not total compliance was, by definition, bad” (Nović p. 53).

“Spells” and “behaviours” describe a lack of diagnostic specificity and, therefore, informational. Supporting this notion, by avoiding specific or compassionate terms—such as misbehaving or atypical behaviours—parents and teachers are violating the Quantity maxim and reducing Charlie’s stressors into manageable labels rather than having an understanding of the contextual situation. This contributes to her perceived disconnection from her peers; notably, this finding aligns with studies that demonstrate a relationship between language minimisation and emotional invalidation in children with disabilities.

#### 4.4. Charlie and Her Mother: Emotional Overload without Clarity

A speech event by Charlie’s mother illustrates the point of emotionally heightened speech also violating the Maxim of Quantity. In a moment of frustration, she states:

**Mother:** “You have no idea what it’s like having made a human being who hates you!” (Nović, p. 37)

This highly effective speech act conveys little content or explanation for her feelings or their rift. The lack of elaboration and affect-drenched communication inhibits Charlie’s and the reader’s possibility of interpretation. Research has shown in family discourse that affect-laden communicative acts devoid of explanatory content obstruct mutual understanding and impose additional psychological strain on the family relationship.

## 5. Discussion of the Violation of Grice’s Maxim of Quantity

### 5.1. Withholding of Information and Disability Autonomy in *True Biz*

The deliberate application of Grice’s Maxim of Quantity in *True Biz* illustrates a crucial component of disability discourse—the individual’s ability to control their story and narrative. February Waters’ intentional withholding of in-

formation to account for the listener’s lack of knowledge does not merely violate conversational norms but rather disrupts the dehumanising impulse of the hearing majority to objectify Deaf people. This narrative action is in line with the social model of disability, which contends that disability is not something wrong with individuals but rather is a byproduct of hostile societal structures that restrict disabled people’s agency to interact and participate in normative social communication and spaces (presumably referential to whatever norm is representative of the individuals in that space).

This resistance aligns with newer initiatives within disability studies, which highlight the necessity of self-representation and narrative autonomy for individuals from the deaf community and other marginalised groups<sup>[24]</sup>. February’s decision not to disclose any information that might lead the hearing outsiders to discover even medical or academic details of students disrupts a culture of entitlement to disabled bodies and lives. This is similar to critiques evident in more current scholarship, which states that disabled people are often treated not as narrators of their lived experience but instead as objects to be examined<sup>[25]</sup>.

### 5.2. Psychological Impact of Miscommunication in Deaf Experience

The consequences of miscommunication, both emotional and psychological, are highlighted through characters like Charlie, whose identity development has been disrupted by systemic failures to engage in inclusive communication. For example, educators and caregivers use vague language like “spells” or “behaviours”—language that is stigmatising and leads to confusion and emotional dislocation. This aligns with the notion of stigma put forth by Goffman, whose socially ambiguous labels created under the terms of stigma serve to marginalise experience and limit clarity of self-concept<sup>[26]</sup>.

Current literature has recently highlighted the important nature of accurate and empathetic communication important to the emotional well-being of Deaf youth; studies have noted that being given inaccurate or vague communication from family members, and educators appears as one of the most detrimental factors that impact self-esteem, emotional distress, and feelings of isolation of Deaf adolescents and youth<sup>[25]</sup>. Along these lines, Hall’s communication

theory suggests that one's identity is constructed through social experience; therefore, vagueness or interruption in communication can impair an individual's ability to develop a unified self-concept as boundaries are compromised and schemata exposed<sup>[27]</sup>. Charlie's narratives embody this tension, representing a load that grows psychologically through neglectful communication in relational and institutional contexts.

### 5.3. Maxim Violations as Critique of Normative Communication Models

The systematic violations of Grice's conversational maxims in *True Biz* can be interpreted as a broader sociolinguistic critique of normative communication conventions which marginalise disabled people. As McRuer has noted, disability frequently takes the form of a communicative failure, in which the failure is not the failure of disabled people but a failure of these interlocking structures of "norm"<sup>[28]</sup>. The uncertainty behind Nović's withholding of communication suggests that the communicative "failures" are not the Deaf but the interfaces that do not correspond or respond.

This connects to some ongoing discussions in critical disability studies that call into question ableist constructions of language, access, and legitimacy<sup>[29]</sup>. Nović's novel interrogates notions of communicative neutrality in depicting communicative navais with a narrative clarity that looks at how communication conventions work to systematically minimise the experiences of Deaf individuals outside of the auditory mainstream. In addition, blending communication failures (intentionally or not) becomes a notable narrative practice that elevates the strategy to expose and combat structural inequalities.

### 5.4. Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS)

The topics that emerge from *True Biz* present important opportunities to contribute to UN Sustainable Development Goals. First, Goal 4 (Quality Education) is highlighted by focusing on equitable and inclusive education. The novel critiques the institutional failure to provide Deaf-affirmative pedagogies, noting how the inability to communicate and lack of accessibility interfere with learners' educational achievements<sup>[30]</sup>. Second, the commitment to

Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) is expanded as the socio-cultural marginalisation of Deaf individuals is emphasised. The narrative stigmatises how social standards, specifically expectations related to interaction, raise barriers to inclusion while creating emotional harm and distress<sup>[31]</sup>.

Finally, Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) can be generated in the call for institutional change that honours the autonomy and rights of Deaf individuals. The novel asserts that when we advocate for systemic change in how we think about communication and institutional attitudes regarding Deaf individuals, we can combat the erasure of marginalised perspectives and the exclusion of their experience. Literature, including *True Biz*, is an important vehicle through which we can discuss and shape public thinking about rights, inclusive practices, and justice for people with disabilities.

## 6. Conclusions

*True Biz* by Sara Nović is much more than a story; it represents an important commentary on the social and psychological effects of communicative exclusion on the Deaf community. Through Charlie and the other characters, we see how these speech violations are not mere linguistic fails but tell a story of deeper, structural inequalities. When communication breaks down, whether from withholding information or having too much information, it makes visible, the lived experiences of Deaf people trying to be in a world meant for hearing people.

Practically, the novel opens our perspectives to how we, as a society, educators, healthcare professionals, family members and friends—do not adhere to the autonomy and identity of a Deaf person. Identifying as Deaf is not sufficient to respect a Deaf person; rather, we often create speech culture through speech therapy, cochlear implants, and family expectations. These practices create emotional pain and deny control over their own lives while diminishing the visibility of Deaf lives.

*True Biz* encourages a fresh perspective on Deafness; rather than seeing Deafness as a deficiency, we should learn to see Deafness as an identity to be celebrated, recognised and respected. *True Biz* advocates for education supporting multiple languages and diversity while encouraging education and policies that foster dignity, agency and belonging for

everyone. This narrative intersects with global movements for disability rights, calling for changes in both attitudes and structures toward how Deaf people are accommodated. Most importantly, the present paper explicitly advocates the inclusion of *True Biz* in academic syllabi.

By examining identity, communication and social justice, *True Biz* enables students to examine societal power structures while nurturing empathy for marginalised individuals. *True Biz* sends a strong call to action for building a society where we communicate to include and listen to hear what is being said and advocate for everyone to communicate without fear or restraint regarding self-expression. In this way, although *True Biz* involves story-telling, it is an educational experience that can promote the disability narrative and inclusive practice.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, P.N.; methodology, P.N. and A.K.; software, P.N.; validation, P.N. and A.K.; formal analysis, P.N.; investigation, P.N.; resources, P.N.; data curation, P.N.; writing—original draft preparation, P.N.; writing—review and editing, P.N. and A.K.; visualization, P.N.; supervision, A.K.; project administration, P.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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