ISSA Proceedings 1998 – Framing Blame And Managing Accountability To Pragma-Dialectical Principles In Congressional Testimony

On July 7, 1987, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver L. North appeared before the Select Committee of the United States Congress investigating the Iran-Contra affair. The name Iran-Contra refers to a two pronged initiative conducted covertly by the National Security Council**[i]** (NSC) to (a) sell weapon systems to Iran in exchange for the release of Americans taken hostage by fundamentalist Islamic groups in Lebanon, and (b) divert profits from these weapons transaction in support of the Contra rebel resistance movement fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. North served on the staff of the NSC and was the individual widely thought to be responsible for many of the covert activities under investigation by the select committee (*Newsweek*, January 19, 1987: 17).

Congressional Hearings have as their ostensible goal the uncovering of "truth." This occurs in part through unmasking and making public the various acts and activities of individuals and organizations of interest to the American government and people.
This truth oriented goal is identified in the observations provided by two members serving on the Select Committee conducting the Iran-Contra hearings, Congressman Bill McCollum (R-Florida) and Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (D-Maryland). Their commentary occurred on the last day of the initial questioning of North by the attorneys for the Select Committee.

Example A: 324-325
01 McClm: Their job, I thought, in my opinion, whether it's Senate counsel or House counsel, is to bring out facts, not to give positions, not to slant biases. And I think Mr. Liman has been going through a whole pattern of biased questions

today. He has done some of that in the past, but it has been particularly egregious this morning.
04 Sarb: 'And I think the witnesses that come before us come here in order to help us to get at the truth…But, I think Counsel's questioning has been reasonable and tough, but it's been within proper parameters… it's a responsibility of Counsel and of the members of this committee to press the witnesses very hard to find out the truth in this matter.

These remarks in the participant's own voices highlight several important aspects of congressional hearings. First, the publicly stated goal of such hearings is to bring the facts or "truth" into public view. Second, there are at least two participants who occupy different roles. A questioner presents questions to respondents who provide answers. Participants in the hearing process share the responsibility for getting facts or truth of a matter into the open. With this responsibility comes accountability on the part of each participant to the process. In example A, McCollum asserts the function of the questioner is to uncover facts, the questioners being in this case the legal counsels for the Select Committee who performed the majority of the questioning of Colonel North and other witnesses.

Sarbanes represents the function of the hearings as "to get at the truth." Witnesses, occupying the role of answerer, participate in order to help uncover the truth.

1. The Problem
While serving to illuminate underlying assumptions, the metacommentary between McCollum and Sarbanes presents a sharp contrast in the characterization of the questioning being done by the legal counsel to the Senate side of the Select Committee, Arthur Liman. McCollum is accusing Liman of asking questions that are slanted or biased. These question asking tactics deviate from the ideal of fact finding. Sarbanes presents a very different accounting of Liman's actions by characterizing his questions as 'reasonable and tough.' The manner of questioning is subordinated to the need and responsibility for getting at the truth.

Quine (1960) presents the problem of indeterminacy as the potential for different systems of translation to co-exist, each system being capable of producing a complete and useful interpretation that is different from those provided by other

systems. In our example, however, both McCollum and Sarbanes appear to be orienting to the same interpretive framework in their remarks yet they also derive very different evaluations as to the conduct of the questioning.

This indeterminacy creates two problems for the inquiry process.
First, how can we determine what system is guiding the interpretation of discourse in the face of many possible systems?
Second, how does the same system of interpretation produce diametrically opposing interpretations of an act or actions?

This work approaches these questions from a pragma-dialectical perspective in suggesting congressional testimony is guided by a blend of Gricean pragmatics combined with an argumentative dialectic. Particular structural features inherent in this system of interpretation provide opportunities within the dialectic process for participants to demonstrate accountability to the process while challenging the accountability of others. A specific feature of the Gricean system, generating conversational implicatures from maxim violations provides participants with the resources to construct incommensurable positions that serve to thwart the ability to arrive at a decision as to which facts will be accepted. The procedures designed to arrive at critically examined outcomes carries within it the seeds of its own disruption.

2. The Inquiry Process

The Gricean system and pragma-dialectics will be described followed by examination of meta-commentary illustrating the orientation of players to these principles and how accountability to the process is pushed via interpretation of the conversational maxims.

A series of extended examples highlighting moves of the participants in the creation of incommensurable positions is presented towards the end of the paper to show the interpretive problem potential inherent in the pragmatics of the process.

Perhaps the most common discourse mechanism employed to uncover facts is the question-answer dialogue (Walton, 1989) of the kind used in courts and other arenas where testimony is sought, probed, and evaluated. This dialogue is a form of dialectic involving a questioner and a respondent. The goal of the dialectic is for the participants to exchange questions and answers on a topic until the truth

is uncovered. By truth, we do not mean an a-priori set of assumptions existing independently of the participants. Rather, the notion of truth is treated here as a set of socially constructed and negotiated premises which become accepted, though perhaps reluctantly by some co-constructors, as the explanation or account that is to be privileged.

The value placed upon truth obtained from discourse depends in part on the applicability of the interpretation beyond the discourse space in which it was derived as well as on the quality of the mechanisms used to construct the truth. This interpretive probing and testing of facts is an activity well suited to the pragma-dialectic approach to argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; 1994). Pragma-dialectics views argumentation as a type of critical discussion between interlocutors.

Standpoints or substantive positions held by each participant are identified through exchanges between the participants. Each standpoint or position must be adequately defended if it is to achieve privileged status. The privileged status of acceptance held by any given standpoint is subject to immediate challenge at any time. A standpoint loses privileged status upon failure of the proffered defence.

The idealized nature of the question-answer dialectic holds that questions and responses should be free from bias. Thus, arguments should not be made in favor of a motivated position held by either participant. The participants should not bring already formed standpoints to the dialectic process. Yet, the underlying presuppositions of speech acts are subject to argumentative testing much in the same way that pragma-dialectics engages in the evaluation of standpoints. As the question-answer dialectic proceeds certain speech acts are retained and take on the force of standpoints which become accepted as having factual status.

The facts or truth of the matter become those items agreed to by the participants as the facts most tenable in the face of counter reasoning (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck-Henkemans, 1996: 55) introduced during dialectical engagement by the participants.

The pragma-dialectical approach sets forth specific rules for the conduct of critical discussions. Critical discussions, like many other forms of goal oriented discourse, however, can be seen as orienting to a more abstract set of guidelines which underlie and motivate communicative interaction. The “Principle of

Communication" set forth by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992: 50) requires interactants to "be clear, honest, efficient, and to the point." The Principle of Communication is a restatement of the Cooperative Principle (CP) and Conversational Maxims set forth by Grice (1975: 45). The CP requires speakers to make their conversational contributions "such as is required, at the stage in which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [they] are engaged." The CP in conjunction with four Conversational Maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner functions as an interpretive system for evaluating the communicative contribution of any utterance.

The *Quality Maxim* requires speakers to say what is true.
Speakers should not say that which they know to be false and should have adequate evidence for what they do say. The *Quantity Maxim* requires speakers to provide as much information as is necessary (for the purposes of the exchange) but speakers should not provide more information than is necessary. The *Relation Maxim* requires speakers to be relevant. The *Manner Maxim* deals with how something is said.

Speakers are expected to say things in ways that are clear, efficient, orderly, and to the point. They should avoid ambiguity and obscurity of expression. Speakers and their contributions are presumed to adhere to the CP and Conversational Maxims. Grice's pragmatic point in positing such a system is not that speakers follow the CP and Maxims exactly. Much of our discourse appears to be disorderly and uncooperative (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993) on the surface. When confronted by discourse that appears to violate the CP and Maxim(s), participants in the conversation need to reconstruct an interpretation of the conversational contribution which preserves as many of the Maxims as possible. The resulting interpretation is a conversational implicature.

There are four ways in which the Maxims can be violated.
Quiet and unostentatious violations are done when speakers hide their violations such as in deception. Opting out is when speakers choose to withdraw from cooperative interaction such as in refusing to answer any more questions. A clash between maxims occurs when the demands of one maxim compete with the demands of another maxim. This is the sort of problem where a speaker has to be either over or under informative (violate Quantity) in order to say only that which is believed to be true (preserve Quality).
Finally, flouts are blatant attempts by speakers to violate the maxims for reasons

other than unostentatious violations, opting out, or clashes. Deceptive violations, when uncovered, carry a presumption of uncooperativeness by the speaker. Opting out and clashes between maxims suggest their own built in interpretations. Flouts require the hearer to generate conversational implicatures as to the nature of the violation.

The CP and Maxims provides a flexible system for interpreting and evaluating the information value of a given utterance in that the maxims are considered in relationship to the purposes or goals of the talk exchange. The flexibility of this system is apparent in its application to the question-answer dialectic of congressional testimony.

While all of the participants are accountable to the CP and Maxims, what constitutes accountability to the maxims is considered in relationship to the types of contributions expected from the participants. For instance, the Quality Maxim as envisioned by Grice applies to assertives. Question asking in the dialectic is used to test whether the presuppositions that motivate the question are true or not. These presuppositions come from prior assertions made by the respondent. It is up to the respondent to ensure the responses are true or there is sufficient reason to believe the response is true.

At the same time, the motives of the questioner can be called into question under the quality maxim if the question is biased or favoring a particular interpretation. The quality maxim functions in this sense much like a sincerity principle.

The Quantity Maxim functions as an efficiency condition. Applied to questioners, this maxim would require questioners to ask only questions which the answer is not known. Previously asked questions should not be recycled if an adequate response has been provided. Questioners are also responsible for asking questions that will ensure the obtaining of information to uncover the truth. Respondents are required to provide sufficient information in their answer.

The preference for agreement between the response and previous speech act is such that responses should address the requirements set forth by the previous speech act (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1975).

The Relation Maxim is a restatement of the ideas contained in the CP. This reformulation of the CP emphasizes the need for contributions to relate

meaningfully at either the global or local level (Tracy, 1984). Questioners are accountable to the global level in that questions need to have a visible connection to a higher order goal or purpose (Jacobs & Jackson, 1992). Questioners have considerable latitude in the question-answer dialectic as to what counts in terms of local relevance. Questions can be put before the respondent in any desired order and the questioner has a choice as to which questions get inserted into the discourse space, in accord with the need to get at the truth. Responses are restricted at the local level to the immediate functional demands of the prior response.

The response has to answer the question. Finally, the Manner Maxim requires both questions and answers to be straightforward, unambiguous, and to the point.

To represent congressional hearings as functioning solely to uncover truth is to be politically naive. These hearings often become highly politicized affairs where questions of power and privilege are decided. In the Iran-Contra hearings, issues included possible violations of the Constitution as well as partisan side taking along party lines. I have argued in other works that different language games are conducted under cover of the dialectic (Aldrich, 1993; Aldrich, 1997). However, before decisions can be made as a result of hearings, a consensus has to be reached as to what is given the status of 'truth.' The establishment of this consensus is the function of dialectic. Since the CP is framed in terms of the dialectic or importance of getting at truth, the moves by each player become accountable to the dialectic.

3. Orientations To The Process

It can be very difficult to determine which particular system of interpretation is in effect given the problem of indeterminacy and competing argumentation schemes (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck-Henkemans, 1996: 291). Meta-communication or talk about talk (Watzlawick, Bavalis, & Jackson, 1967) provides one means by which underlying interpretive systems can be identified.

Such meta-communication can take the form of explicit discussion of the rules to be followed (as is often done by committees prior to the start of hearings) or be found in remedial talk (Goffman, 1971) used to repair hitches in the flow of discourse. The Iran-Contra hearings generally, and the testimony of Colonel North specifically, provide a rich source of meta-commentary about the conduct of the hearing process and the type of interpretive system in use. This orientation

can be seen in the following examples taken from the testimony of North before the select committee. The public goal of congressional inquiry is to uncover facts or truth. The questioner claims this dialectical goal as the main function of the hearings in example B while the respondent claims personal orientation to this goal in example C.

Example B: p.10
Nields: And it is a principal purpose of these hearings to replace secrecy and deception with disclosure and truth. And that's one of the reasons we have called you here, sir.

Example C: p.26
Liman: Now, do you recall – and I don't want to belabor this, believe me, but we have to get facts.
North: I am here to give you the facts, Counsel.

These assertions found in the meta commentary about the discourse do more than simply support the claim that a truth oriented dialectic language game is in play, they function as pragmatic resources through which each participant can account for his own moves in relationship to the standards of the dialectic process.

In example C, Liman claims fact finding as his goal. His move also contains a rationale for his questioning tactics. Questioners are expected to ask questions which move the dialogue forward and orient towards higher order purposes. Asking questions about topics previously covered or staying too long in any one area of inquiry can be interpreted as violating the Relation and/or Manner maxims. Liman's move functions to pre-empt potential charges of uncooperativeness in the way he is conducting his questioning of North by highlighting the overall point behind his actions.

With fact finding as the principle goal of the question-answer dialectic, questioners are responsible for asking questions which function to help the respondent get facts out onto the table. The types of facts obtained depend in large part upon the conduct of the questioning.

The questioner has the requirement to ask relevant questions and to not miss anything which should be asked.

Example D: p.97

Nields: I want to make sure that I have asked all the questions that are important to ask.

4. Interpreting The Process

Both the questioner and respondent are accountable to the ideals of the CP and normative set of pragma-dialectical rules. The next few examples highlight both the types of framing available to participants in declaring adherence to the principles as well as problems of accountability to these principles. Counsel for the House of Representatives, John Nields presents a benign framing of his use of questions to help North get information out on the table.

Example E: p.65

Nields: I understand that, and we appreciate your testimony, and I'm going to continue to ask questions to see whether it jogs any other recollections.

This type of self presentation (Goffman, 1959) is consistent with the Quality Maxim in framing the questioning as being sincere, and with the Relation Maxim in making the higher order purpose visible of getting the available facts out into the open. This type of formulation is also very consistent with the rules for critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992) in terms of seeking all available information.

The above formulation by Nields is in stark contrast to the ad hominem attack used by Arthur Liman in response to North's persistent inability to recall specific events.

Example F: p.252

North: That is certainly my recollection. If we could just go to that –
Liman: I'm going to come to it in more detail later, but if you have something that you want to say now, you better say it while you remember it.
North: Unkind.

Liman exercises his control of the discourse space by shifting his line of questioning from one subject to another. His move also implies North has a poor memory. Reduced availability of information is a problem for a dialectical process that is so information dependent. Liman's move also has a flavor of blame imbedded in it for this is the type of move which could be used to question the overall cooperativeness of a respondent. A pronounced series of memory lapses

can be characterized as opting out of the discourse space through omission rather than commission.

Deviations from the ideals of the CP and pragma dialectic principles provide grounds for substantive challenges on the part of participants. At the same time, committing fallacious moves in response to perceived violations doesn't help the player in terms of his own accountability to pragma dialectical procedures. Liman attempts a subsequent move to repair some of this damage to his own position.

Example G: p.401
Liman: Did Mr. Sullivan refresh your recollection, where you want to add to the answer, because I'm not saying that in criticism. I am saying that so that if there is something that should be added to this record, it should be added.
Sullivan: Next question, Mr. Liman.

Liman makes a much more direct orientation to the goal of getting maximal information out into the open in a way similar to Nields' tactics already discussed. That this response seems to pander to the ideals of the dialectical process is apparent in Sullivan's curt response and the knowledge that this move followed a series of lengthy and acrid exchanges between Liman and Sullivan as to North's need for having his memory refreshed with constant input from Sullivan and the notebooks containing evidence. The point is not to question the sincerity with which each player is making moves in a dialectical discourse space, but to show the orientation of each player to the ideals of the process through their meta-commentary.

The questioner has considerable power due to his position in the Q-A dialectic relative to the answerer. Questioners get to set the pace of questions as well as choosing which questions to ask and when to ask them. Examples H and J are responses from the chair of the select committee, Senator Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) to charges by Sullivan that the questioner is not allowing North to respond adequately to the question.

Example H: p.115
Sullivan: Could counsel please permit the witness to finish his answer and not to interrupt him in mid-answer.
Inouye: The counsel may decide the pace, sir.

Example J: p.134

Inouye: We will proceed in the fashion we wish to.

Up to this point a claim has been made that congressional hearings orient towards a question-answer dialectic in which the declared goal or point of the process is to uncover truth. This process imposes certain standards for evaluation of the informative contributions of the participants through the CP and Conversational Maxims combined with the pragma-dialectical rules for critical discussion.

These orientations are apparent in the meta commentary provided to us by the participants in the testimony of Colonel North before Congress.

Also apparent in some of these examples is a blaming quality as the participants challenge the accountability of each other's moves to the ideals of the dialectal process. If moves are found lacking in terms of their dialectical appropriateness, any information produced by the defective moves itself becomes defective. Both the questioner and respondent have access to the underlying pragmatics of the dialectic. Each side makes strategic use of the pragmatics in holding the other side accountable to the process.

The primary questioners, Nields and Liman, view North's contributions to the discourse as being less than responsive to the questions. In fact, they point towards what they feel is overt uncooperativeness on the part of North and his attorney, Brendan Sullivan. This amounts to opting out. North and Sullivan take a different orientation in regards to the pragmatic principles. North's moves have the flavor of under informativeness on the one hand and over informativeness on the other. North can claim this as resulting from a clash between the demands of the Quality Maxim to tell the truth and the Quantity Maxim of providing sufficient information. North and Sullivan move to make the claims of clash between these maxims explicit to the questioner and audience of the hearings.

Example K: p.18
01 Nields: And, the President was then suffering domestic political damage, was he not, as a result of the publicity surrounding the Iranian arms mission?
02 North: Well, I – you'll have to leave that assessment to the political pundits. My concern –
03 Nields: No, I'm asking you.
04 North: You're asking what?

In turn 01, Nields asks whether North believed President Reagan suffered harm from the public disclosure of the weapons transactions with Iran. North's response explicitly avoids answering the question in any fashion. North tries to opt out by deferring the question to 'political pundits' for assessment. In turn 03, Nields challenges North's move by explicitly identifying North as the target of the answer. Several turns later, Nields obtains a 'yes' response from North to this question.

Example L: p.254-255
01 Liman: And so that there were copies of the five [memoranda]
02 North: Exactly.
03 Liman: And, did you look over them, to see whose names were written on them?
04 North: I think we've already been through this once, counsel –
05 Liman: You said you didn't recall, and I'm asking you whether you looked.
06 North: I don't even remember looking. I remember, if there was something –
07 Liman: Well, you've answered it, then.
08 North: Yeah.
09 Liman: You've said you did not look, is that right?
10 Sulln: Would you like to answer the question, counsel, for him?
11 Liman: No, I'd like him to keep his answers to the questions.
And if it's – if that's the answer, then we ought to move on. Is that the answer that you did not look?

In turns 01 and 03, Liman questions North whether the memoranda requesting approval of the diversion of funds to support the Contras had names on them or not. Identification of a name would suggest someone higher in the Reagan administration than North possessed knowledge about the covert operations.

In turn 04, North challenges Liman's right to ask questions about an area that has already been discussed. In doing so, North calls into question the relevance of this line of questioning at the global level. Rather than taking up North's point, Liman asserts he is asking a different question than what North addressed. Liman claims relevance of his question by grounding it in the activity of whether North looked to see if there were names on the memos or not. There is a subtle shift here from North's memory (recall or no recall) to North's actions (looking or not looking). In turn 07, Liman acknowledges North's move in the previous turn as having answered the question. Liman moves yet again in turn 09 to reformulate

the question so as to get an “on record” (Brown & Levinson, 1978) response from North that is directly responsive to the question. Sullivan offers a strenuous objection in turn 10. The implication here is that Liman is overreaching his dialectical ground as a questioner. Liman affirms the need to adhere to the Quantity Maxim and move the questioning forward if North has actually provided an on record answer to the question. Liman also asserts in turn 10 that it is the deficient responses that move beyond the pale of inquiry which motivates the recycling of questions.

Example M: p.128
01 Nields: And did you let them know how much the contra needed money for munitions?
02 North: I’d let them know how much the contra needed everything. The Nicaraguan freedom fighters were at a point where they were dying in the field under Soviet HIND helicopters –
03 Nields: And did you do that together with Spitz Channell? pardon?
04 Sulln: Let him finish please.
05 North: (to Mr. Nields): Pardon?
06 Sulln: I know you don’t like the answer, but let him finish.
07 Nields: I like the answer fine. It was not responsive.
08 Sulln: Well fine, then let him answer.
09 Nields: He had finished answering the question.
10 Sulln: He had not finished answering or I wouldn’t have raised the subject.
11 Inouye: Proceed.
12 North: I don’t know whose turn it is Mr. Chairman.

Nields asks North an open-ended question in turn 01. North doesn’t have to limit his answer to yes/no in order to be responsive. North tries to provide additional information about the effectiveness of Soviet attack helicopters against the Contra “freedom fighters.”
Nields shuts down this attempt by interjecting another question in turn 03. Sullivan objects and asserts North should be allowed to complete his answer. In turn 07, Nields characterizes North’s answer as being non responsive to the question. In reply to Sullivan’s charge that North has not finished his answer, Nields states in turn 09 that North had finished answering the question.

The legal counsel for the select committee spent much of their time trying to hold North accountable to the CP and Maxims in terms of answers that were under

informative by omission of details or non responsiveness to the question and answers that were overly informative in terms of providing information that moved beyond the scope of the question. In contrast, North, and his attorney Sullivan, spent much of their time objecting to the attempts to limit North's responses. Example O follows a 10 minute response by North to a question from Nields.

Example O: p.111
01 Nields: I think the only question had to do with price.
02 North: I know it has to do with price.
03 Nields: I think the only question had to do with price.
04 Sulln: Mr. Nields, Mr. Chairman, if the witness believes that something is related to the subject matter of the question he should be permitted to answer.
05 Inouye: The question related to price and I hope that the witness will respond to the question.
06 North: Mr. Chairman, I tried to respond to the question of price.

In turn 01, Nields highlights the non-responsiveness of North's answer by stating the only question being asked was price. This move suggests that North answered other 'non' questions in his response. Nields adds additional emphasis to the dialectical shortcomings of North's response through repeating his assertion in turn 03.
Sullivan's objection in turn 04 explicitly affirms the importance of allowing additional information to be expressed if the witness sees some sort of connection or relevance to the subject matter. In referring to subject matter, Sullivan is pushing for the global relevance of the Relation Maxim to be extended to replies to questions. Such an interpretation would allow answers that move beyond the local relevance to the preceding question. This would also allow overly informative answers to the local question to be supported on the basis of a higher order relevance. North asserts in the face of Inouye's objection that North has indeed responded to the question.
The quantity violations of North's lengthy replies invoked the characterization of speeches by both counsels for the select committee and the committee chair.

Example P: p.172
Inouye: I believe we have been extremely sensitive to your client. I believe the record will show that we have not objected to unresponsive answers. Many questions that could have been easily answered by a simple yes or no have taken

15 minutes and the Chair has not interrupted. We have permitted speeches to be made here.

The final example provides the clearest interpretation on the part of North and Sullivan that a clash between maxims is the underlying reason for the quantity of North's responses to questions. Sullivan asserts this is done not for the purposes of giving speeches. Rather, North has to violate quantity through lengthy answers in order for the truth to be told.

Example Q: p.184
Inouye: But as far as I'm concerned, it was a very lengthy statement. Some people consider lengthy statements to be speeches. Counsel, proceed.
Nields: I'm perfectly happy to use the expression "lengthy statements."
You've made several lengthy statements to the committee on the subject of covert operations.
Sullivan: How about using "lengthy answer" – in order for him to get the truth before the committee?

5. Conclusion
The congressional hearing process claims an orientation to a pragma-dialectically based process of fact finding inquiry. These claims and the pragmatic structure can be found in the meta commentary obtained from the participants in these hearings. The pragmatic structure of the Gricean pragmatics provide resources for each participant to anchor their deviations from the pragma-dialectic ideals as either having to push witnesses hard lest these witnesses opt out or having to provide informationally deficient responses through claiming a clash between the maxims of Quality and Quantity.

The Conversational Maxims can be used to create an interpretive impasse to shut down the dialectical process all together. A common feature of many of the alleged violations of the Maxims is the way in which the violations are committed. How something is said is an issue for the Manner Maxims (Grice, 1975). Quality violations, particularly those occurring through omission rather than commission, can be repaired by changing the way in which something is said. Violations of Quantity are also for the most part violations of Manner. Responses that are under informative are often responses that have ambiguous features or use obscurity of expressions. Responses that are over informative can be pushed towards brevity. Opting out is of course brevity taken to the extreme condition.

The ideal system has to consider both informational content and contribution. Monitoring the manner of discourse is one activity which judges are responsible for in court rooms. What counts as acceptable questions and answers are much more limited and defined. Congressional hearings seek a broader latitude of discourse but with this latitude comes procedural opportunities that highly skilled users of language can exploit. Pragma-dialectics, as a system for evaluating discourse, needs to take into account how information is communicated (Aldrich & Jacobs, 1997) as well as what gets communicated. Only then can the latitude of discourse be satisfactorily addressed.

NOTES

[i] The National Security Council advises the President of the United States on issues concerning security and strategic planning.

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