

# A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF INTERROGATIVES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR

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## **Abstract**

The introduction of the concept of context into linguistic studies has brought to the fore an important fact that language is used in specific situations primarily to accomplish specific functions and the intended meanings of utterances depend largely on different contextual cues. This study, which adopts a descriptive approach, is a pragmatic investigation of the communicative functions of questions in the discourse between God and man as recorded in Genesis chapters three and four. The data was sourced from the NIV Bible. Eleven interrogative utterances were identified and analysed using the pragmatic concept of presupposition and the speech act theory. The analysis revealed that the questions in the discourse are loaded with different presuppositions and indirect speech acts. Pragmatically therefore, it is very important to note that the manner in which an utterance is expressed is an integral aspect of what is said.

**Key Words:** Pragmatics, Presupposition, Speech act theory, Mood structure

## **Introduction**

The shift from studying linguistic forms for their mere structural relevance to their functional relevance has been the preoccupation of functional linguists whose works emphasize the point that language is employed to accomplish specific acts and the meanings of linguistic forms can be traced to the socio-cultural contexts of language use. Scholarly works of men like Malinowski (1923) Hymes (1967, 1971), Austin (1962), Grice (1975), as well as Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) have brought to limelight the relevance of socio-cultural contexts in the study of linguistic meaning and on the basis of its importance, much effort is directed at identifying the way speakers

use language to negotiate meanings, role relationships, peer solidarity, politeness and other related issues that can be discussed in the field of pragmatics. In every form of social interaction among humans, participants seek to communicate meaning, either directly or indirectly via a deliberate or spontaneous choice of utterances in specific contexts of the communicative events.

According to Spencer-Oatey and Zegarac (2010,73), the words of an utterance do not always fully determine its meaning because there is an existing gap in the meaning of the words used by a speaker and his/her intended thought in using such words. Therefore, they surmise that technically, the linguistic meaning of an utterance underdetermines the speaker's intended meaning and this gap is filled by the hearer's reasoning about what the speaker may have intended to communicate by his or her utterance. How a listener is able to understand or recover the intended meaning of an utterance made by a speaker in a given context can be explained pragmatically. Grice (1967, 1989) quoted in Spencer-Oatey and Zegarac (2010, 73) argues that "people are disposed to presume that communicative behaviour is guided by a set of principles and norms referred to as the cooperative principle and maxims of conversation." This implies that participants in a communicative event must necessarily adhere to these maxims so as to enhance a smooth flow of communication between them. Any form of violation of these maxims will definitely hinder effective exchange of messages.

It can be deduced from the preceding discussion that pragmatics as a linguistic field focuses on the study of various dimensions of linguistic choices and constraints available to speakers on different situational contexts. It is concerned with the study of language use in relation to the contextual clues upon which utterances and their interpretation by speakers/hearers are predicated. As a field, pragmatics is the study of the relationship existing between meanings of utterances and the participants involved in communicative events. According to Levison (1983) in Adebunmi (2015) "pragmatics is the study of language usage" (p.197). It is about the study of those principles

that explain why a certain set of sentences is anomalous or not possible utterances. In the Encyclopaedia of language and languages (1990) in Odebunmi (2015), pragmatics is defined as “the study of language from the point of view of the users especially of the choices they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on their participants” (p.197). From Yule’s (1996) submission, pragmatics as a field includes the study of speakers’ intended as well as contextual meanings; it is the study of the invisible meaning and how such is recognized even when not explicitly said or written and this is made possible by depending on shared assumptions and expectations. Yule’s definition highlights the roles of participants in meaningful exchange in a particular social situation and it is a revelation of how users of language fill a central place in the situation in which utterances are expressed in relation to other contextual variables.

According to Adegbija (1999) quoted in Odebunmi (2015,173): Pragmatics is the study of language use in particular communicative contexts or situation. This would take cognizance of the message being communicated or the speech act being performed, the participants involved, their intention knowledge of the world and the impact these have on their interaction, what they have taken for granted as part of the context (or the presuppositions) and the deductions they make on the basis of what is said or left unsaid; the impact of non-verbal aspects of interaction on meaning. (p. 198)

The above view is all- encompassing as it brings to the fore certain aspects that pragmatics is concerned with which include: messages being communicated, the speech acts speakers perform or their intentions expressed on the basis of their shared common knowledge; the participants involved in the communicative events; the effects of the acts performed or the intention of the expressed utterance on other interlocutors involved in the communication process; the participants assumptions; how they express their understanding of the ideas or speech acts performed and effects of and meanings that are associated with nonverbal acts. He (Odebunmi 2015) posits that

pragmatics is “the study of the meaning that is constrained by discourse participants, context determined or context shaped roles, access to shared or accommodated beliefs, negotiation of discursive choices and interactive orientation” (p.199). The main highlights of the above perspective include the participants, their discursive contexts which determine or shape their conversations, their assumptions or what they accept as part of the context, their mutual constructed meaning of words and their approved or disapproved interpretations of utterances.

From the foregoing discussion, the role of context in meaningful interaction by participants cannot be overemphasized. What people say or do with words is influenced by various contextual cues and in this wise, pragmatics has a broad scope and very specific goals which Osisanwo (2003) summarizes in the form of interrogatives stated below.

- i. How do utterances convey meaning?
- ii. What are the roles of context in encoding and decoding message?
- iii. How is meaning decoded from utterances in contexts and situations?
- iv. What are causes of wrong message encoding?
- v. How do interlocutors respond to messages and meaning?
- vi. What are the causes of wrong message encoding? (p.57)

Mey (2001) posits that pragmatics as a new paradigm of research implies a shift from studying language as a human product to language in its human use, in which case attention is on the description of its use and not its structure as obtained in traditional methods of linguistic study. From this perspective therefore, pragmatics then belongs properly to the domain that Chomsky referred to as performance. He maintains that humans, as social beings, relate with one another in society through language which apparently is the chief means of communication in society. Therefore, the use of language by people is dependent on societal control and their access to available linguistic and communicative means. Summarily, he defines “Pragmatics as the study of language use in human communication as determined by the conditions of society” (p.6).

This study aims to underscore the pragmatic functions of interrogatives in communication; how participants can express more meaning than what their utterances might mean and how their questions are interpreted by their hearers within the context of the communicative event.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Presupposition**

Presupposition and speech acts have been employed as the conceptual and theoretical framework for analysing the data for this study. Discourse participants engaged in active language use (oral or written form) often make assumptions while crafting their messages on the premise of what their hearers/readers already know. Even though some of these assumptions are sometimes erroneously made, they are important aspects of language use as participants encode and decode meanings of utterances in daily interactions across different social situations of human existence. These assumptions, which speakers/writers make concerning the topic of discourse, are predicated on assumed common ground hence they are questioned by the interlocutors. On the basis of the implied assumptions about a given subject matter, speakers in a communication process leave out certain information which is considered as part of the meaning(s) communicated and when this occurs, technically, a presupposition is said to have been used.

Jauro (2014) posits that presupposition is an aspect of pragmatics which accounts for characteristics of texts and contexts which traditional sentence grammar singly cannot unravel. This means that with presupposition, more meaning can be deduced from a text than is contained in a sentence or an utterance. Yule (1996) submits that presupposition means what a speaker assumes to be true and is known by the hearer. It is the assumption made by participants of something considered to be true which underscore the appropriateness of an utterance. For example, "Mrs Atung has relocated from Gonin Gora" presupposes that Mrs Atung once lived in Gonin Gora. "The

students have stopped protesting” presupposes that the students previously protested. From the preceding examples, there are implicit assumptions in the sentences which are true, hence the appropriateness of the sentences.

A presupposition is, in fact, an implicit assumption a speaker establishes before making an utterance. In this case, it is a speaker and not sentences that presuppose, quite contrary to entailment which refers to something that follows logically from an assertion in an utterance (Yingfang 2007) quoted in Jauro (2014). Pragmatic presupposition is a relationship which holds between sentences or propositions with their interpretation. The above view is hinged first on logical consequence relations and secondly on the conditions for the appropriateness of sentences expressed such that the sentences (1) Hauwa’s brother is kind-hearted and (2) Hauwa’s brother is not kind-hearted” presuppose that Hauwa has a brother.

Amodu (2017) maintains that presupposition is borrowed from the field of logic and has become a crucial tool in persuasive language situations and this explains the reason why it is the speaker and not the sentence that presupposes. Language users employ presupposition for reasons such as being economical with words and boosting the excitement in language use for communication. As a common feature of daily language use, presupposition is employed in special ways by advertisers, lawyers and law enforcement agencies. Importantly, it should be noted that as a pragmatic concept, it is an aspect of the set of assumptions which interlocutors make while interacting which is referred to as the common ground or mutual knowledge (i.e., the knowledge speakers have in common) or which is mutually shared based on certain contextual cues such as culture, physical environment and linguistic knowledge. This mutual knowledge is often assumed prior to making an utterance. In fact, the appropriateness of an utterance is predicated on this assumed mutual knowledge.

Contrary to semantic presupposition which emphasizes logical relations between sentences, pragmatic presupposition pays attention to certain necessary conditions for making speech acts suitable in

particular contexts; therefore, it is concerned with assumptions about the context or that truth taken for granted by a speaker as part of the background of the conversation. (Osisanwo, 2003). Yule (1996) identifies six different types of presupposition thus: existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual presuppositions. The preceding discussion is relevant in this study mainly for the fact that the study seeks to underscore what the interrogatives mean in the context they are uttered. Also, it seeks to unravel what the speakers assumed before making the utterances.

### Speech Act Theory

The speech act theory which was propounded by J.L Austin (1962) and expanded more systematically by John Searle (1969) emerged from the premise that language primarily is used to carry out action. This explains why the emphasis is on how meaning and action relate to language. The main focus of the theory is the fact that language, besides being use for describing the world, is also employed to perform a range of actions by merely expressing utterances. This means that certain utterances do not transmit information but are actions carried out by the speakers; in which case language is used to carry out actions such as promising, betting, warning, christening encouraging, swearing and so on. From this perspective, it can be affirmatively said that language exists as a communicative tool by means of which participants in a communicative event accomplish diverse acts as determined by the context in which their utterances are made. Osisanwo (2015); Mey (2001), quoted in Bossan (2017) submit that uttering a speech act by a speaker implies doing something with words; hence, speech acts therefore are verbal actions occurring in the world. By uttering certain speech acts, changes in world affairs are brought about. Ezeifeke (2018,) surmises that;

The speech act theory assumes that utterances are actions in themselves which are capable of producing enormous and far-reaching results or consequences on the hearer. Such acts can affect our whole lives, deny us or restore our freedom, make as to be

committed to a course of action, urge us to carry-out a piece of instruction or change an existing state of affairs.... speech acts are produced by human agents whose intentions are relevant .....and indispensable to the correct understanding and description of their utterances.... (p.50)

Central in the speech act theory is the role of the verbal element in an utterance. As already pointed out, certain utterances are in themselves actions being carried out and these are referred to as performative utterances. These action-oriented utterances are characterized by performative verbs which can either render the utterance explicit or implicit. An explicit performative contains speech acts (SAVs) such as “I promise to marry him”, “I sentence you to 5 years imprisonment”. The implicit performatives are also called primary performatives because they do not contain performative verbs. Another category of verbs used in speech acts is the constative which is employed in making statements, describing situations, events, state of affairs, observing phenomena and asserting their truth or otherwise. Speech acts types identified by Austin are three. He maintains that speakers perform simultaneously different acts when an utterance is directed at some persons or group of people. The three aspects of the theory are:

- i. Locutionary speech acts: this simply refers to the mere act of saying or expressing an utterance. As posited by Yule (1996), producing a meaningful linguistic expression means performing a locutionary act. These utterances are expressed through correct grammatical expression.
- ii. Illocutionary acts: these refer to the performance of an action through the act of making an utterance. Actually, by performing a locutionary act a speaker could consciously or unconsciously be performing some sorts of illocutionary acts. That is, the action performed by the act of saying something. It is the pragmatic force of the utterance, in other words, it is the action contained in the expression. (e.g., suggesting, ordering promising, etc.). This is also the same as the speaker’s intention. These acts carry the force of performatives or the act of performing actions through utterances.



- iii. The perlocutionary, acts: the perlocutionary act refers to the effect an utterance has on the hearer. The action or reaction of a hearer resulting from the speaker's utterance is the perlocutionary effect. Osisanno (2003) notes that "while perlocutions are known to be non-conventional in nature, they can be achieved through conventional acts either verbally or non-verbally" (64).

### **Direct and Indirect Speech Acts**

Another aspect of the speech act theory which is relevant to this study is the distinction made between direct and indirect speech acts. One major feature of everyday language use identified by Grundy (2018) is non-literal or indirectness which often times occurs in the speech of interlocutors. Interestingly, some speech acts are performed indirectly. Direct speech acts are performed either by making a direct literal utterance or by using some performative verbs that clearly show the action being carried out. This means that direct speech acts manifest very clear relationships between their forms or structures and the meanings of the utterances. Direct speech acts are performed in situations where there is an obvious correlation between a structure (form) and its function. Precisely, direct speech acts are performed when the declarative, interrogative and imperative forms are used to make statements, ask questions and issue commands. Example

1. She carried a red umbrella. (declarative)
2. Did she carry a red umbrella? (interrogative)
3. Carry a red umbrella. (imperative)

A speech act is said to be indirect when there is no obvious or direct relationship between structures and their functions. Yule (1996), submits that a structure or a form employed by a speaker to perform a function different from what it is naturally meant to perform is regarded as an indirect speech act. When a declarative such as "You left the AC on" is uttered to someone when the weather is cold, the statement will be understood not just as a mere statement but as a request to switch off the AC

Ezeifeke (2018) notes that Searle's (1971) introduced the notion of direct speech acts to mean indirect illocutionary acts. According to Searle, in indirect speech acts, speakers can communicate to their hearers more than they actually say by way of relying on their mutually shared linguistic and non-linguistic background knowledge/information, in addition to the powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer. He (Searle) identified two illocutionary acts: primary and secondary illocutionary acts. The primary illocutionary act refers to the indirect speech act which is not literally performed because there is no correlation between a structure and its function while the secondary illocutionary act refers to the direct act performed literally in the utterance of the sentence, where there is a clear or direct relationship between the utterance and its function. The division of illocutionary act into direct and indirect helps in explaining the possibility of a speaker saying one thing and meaning it, but in addition could he could mean something different. While the secondary illocutionary is literal the primary illocutionary act is non-literal.

### **The Mood Structure**

This study is carried out mainly for the chief purpose of investigating the indirect speech acts performed through the interrogatives used by the participants. Therefore, a brief discussion on the mood structure becomes relevant and this is carried out from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar which emerged from scale and category grammar. According to Ojo (2011), the term systemic emerged from an important structural assumption of the theory; that language consists of a network of systems. In the words of Bloor and Bloor (2004) " the word systemic encapsulates the idea that an important aspect of the grammar is modelled (or described) in terms of systems, a series of alternatives available to speakers" (p.5). The model considers language as a whole system of choices existing in complex structural relation and this implies that a system exists where the choice of one item determines the choices of another in a different system.

The axis of choice (paradigmatic axis) offers the various or alternative choices available in the chain from which a speaker can select linguistic items for producing sentences.

The system of mood draws attention to the various speech acts performed by speakers such as asking questions, declaring facts, giving instruction etc. This system offers speakers the choices available for pressing an utterance. The mood system basically focuses on the subject as an important sentential element. It seeks to identify whether a subject is present in a clause/sentence, the position in which the subject occurs (whether it occurs before or within the predicator), whether the subject is absent in the clause, and where it is absent, is the speaker of the participants in the action mentioned in the utterance?

In the mood system, the first available choice that can be made by a speaker is between the indicative and imperative utterances. The indicative mood which is the main focus of this study consists of two options; the declarative (which has no options) and the interrogative which may or may not contain WH items at the initial positions. The non WH interrogatives, called polar interrogatives, require either a Yes or No for a response. The utterances can either be interrogatives with subject or non-subject. This study finds the above discussion on mood structure/system relevant in that the utterances that have been identified as data are all interrogatives performing different pragmatic functions. The utterances selected for the study contain both WH and non WH items and are analysed according to Searles (1969) classification of speech acts.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive approach. Eleven interrogatives in Genesis chapters three (3) and four (4) were purposively identified as data. The data was sourced from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. Speech act theory, presupposition and the mood system from Systemic Functional Grammar were employed as descriptive tools. Specifically, each interrogative was analysed based on its structural type, its presupposition content and the direct and indirect speech acts

performed. The analysis employed Yule's classification of presupposition and Searl's classification of speech acts.

### **Presentation and Analysis**

**Datum I: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' Gen.3:16**

The first interrogative directed at the woman came from the serpent and this started off a discourse between the serpent, the woman, the man and God. Structurally, it is a polar question requiring a simple 'yes' or 'no' response from the woman. However, her response revealed that there is a pragmatic presupposition (an assumption by both interlocutors) in the context of the discourse (the physical environment that is, the garden) which consists of trees with different types of fruits from which the first human pair were expected to freely eat with the exception of one. From the utterance, there is an existential presupposition because two entities are named and these are God (the divine being) as well as a particular tree in the garden (that is, God exists, and a particular tree in the garden also is in existence). Another salient presupposition is that an imperative had been issued of which the speaker is aware and the question he asked seems to boarder on the validity of the command given to the man and the woman. With a cursory glance at the question, there is the tendency of concluding that it was asked for the purpose of seeking affirmation or clarification. However, the action of the woman reveals that the purpose of the utterance was not merely seeking for information but it was intended to make her disobey the command given to them.

From the serpent's utterance "Did God really say ...." an indirect speech act of creating doubt can be deduced and this is made clear with the use of the word "really". Though a question, the utterance is intended to create doubt in the woman so that she can avail herself of an alternative offer. The interrogative is not a simple directive demanding the woman to respond by providing a simple information.

Instead, it is used to cast doubt and create suspicion in the woman, of God's intention for issuing the command that they should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Gen 2:17. The question indirectly challenges/persuades the woman to reconsider God's command and act contrary by eating the forbidden fruit because, according to the speaker (serpent), their eyes will be opened and they will be like God, knowing good and evil ( Gen 3:5).

### Datum 2: **Where are you? (Gen 3:9)**

The interrogative/utterance above was directed at the man whom God placed in the garden. It is a WH' item question which suggests an expectation of some information/explanation from the addressee. Superficially, the question demands the listener to provide information of his physical location. From the account, the man and his wife had not changed location to another place because they were still in the garden. However, they were hiding from God because, according to the man, they were naked. Pragmatically, the interrogative presupposes some deeper meanings which can be understood contextually. The word 'where' presupposes the existences of a place where the man and his wife were. But his response clearly shows that they were still in the garden; therefore, the item 'where' can be taken to mean something other than the physical location. The interrogative carries a deeper pragmatic meaning concerning the relationship between the speaker and the addressee who on account of his disobedience was unavailable for fellowship. Having realized that they were naked, they considered themselves unfit for any relationship with God (the Speaker). The choice of an offered alternative had a devastating consequence of creating a barrier between the couple and God. The question was, therefore, not predicated on Gods ignorance of the man and woman's where about. Neither was it meant to accuse them but to reveal the desire by the speaker to restore fellowship with them. Hence, it is considered as a theological question which is to underscore the importance of maintaining an unbroken relationship with their

creator (Hughes 2022). Indirectly, the speech act performed is that of challenging and complaining because the question is a relational and not a mere locational one since the speaker who is all seeing was not unaware of their location.

**Datum 3: Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I command you not to eat? (Gen 3:11).**

Two interrogative utterances are directed at the man. The question “Who told you that you are naked” is a question which presupposes that the man must have been informed of his state of nakedness by someone and therefore was expected to supply who that could be? The second utterance structurally is a polar question which required the addressee to supply a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. The interrogatives are actually more searching than merely seeking for a causal ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. The utterances are all rhetorical in the sense that the Speaker was not ignorant of what had happened in the garden between the serpent and the woman. Pragmatically, the interrogatives presuppose that the couple had disobeyed and were aware of their awful state of nakedness. If they were to realistically respond to the second question, it would have been, something like ‘yes, we ate from that tree and as a result we are naked and that is the reason why we are hiding from you’.

Structurally, the interrogatives above require simple responses, but pragmatically, their function was to make the couple realize the consequences of their action or choice to eat from the tree contrary to God’s command. Their choice made them vulnerable. The interrogatives were a way of exploring the process by which they (the couple) realized their failure. God sought to establish where the man got the idea of nakedness and to bring him to the realization of other voices, the influence of others and how circumstances, situations and forces have conditioned him to entertain such thoughts. The man’s action (eating the forbidden fruit) was informed not only by what the serpent said but by their personal choice because they had the choice to either

listen to the serpent or not. Therefore, they were to bear the consequences of their actions.

#### Dutum 4: **What is this you have done?**

God turned from the man to the woman with a more penetrating ethical question, “what is this you have done”. From the system of mood, the structure contains a ‘WH’ item which suggests the need for information not known by the addressor. The presence of the demonstrative or the deictic (this) is quite revealing; showing how contemptible her action or choice of listening to the serpent is. From a pragmatic perspective, the woman’s action presupposes a deliberate choice because as a moral being what she did could have been avoided if she had not chosen to listen to the serpent who offered what supposedly seemed more advantageous than God’s command. As moral beings, she and the man had the option of choosing their actions. The utterance presupposes an action carried out for which she must bear the consequences.

Indirectly, the interrogative utterance pragmatically boards on the morality of the couple which was directed at the woman to reveal the fact that she was a responsible being who could have chosen to obey or disobey the serpent. Also, this implies that her action had grave eternal consequences. The discourse that followed attest to the fact that they were responsible for their actions. The question reveals a vital aspect of the woman’s existence as human. What she did was a personal choice and she was responsible for the consequence of her action. Their choice of independence attracted God’s curse.

#### Datum 5: **...Why are you angry, why is your face downcast? If you do what is right will you not be accepted? Gen 4:6**

Datum five consists of three questions directed at Cain, the first child of Adam and Eve. The first two questions begin with ‘why’ to presuppose that something had happened on account of which the

addressee was angry. It is as if he was expected to offer explanation for the emotion contained in his heart and expressed outwardly by his downcast face. The third question which contains a conditional item 'if' obviously answers the first two, presupposing that Cain was not accepted on the premise of his failure to do what is right. Pragmatically, the speech acts performed by the interrogative utterances are deeper than simply demanding reasons for the emotional state of the addressee. The first question presupposes that something was responsible for Cain's anger and downcast face. The third utterance however presupposes that his failure to do what is right resulted in the rejection of his offering. It seems that Cain's anger was a reaction against his brother, Abel, who found acceptance before God. Therefore, the questions were intended to unravel the root of his negative emotion and not necessarily ordinary enquiries to make him feel better. The third question indirectly was intended to inform Cain not to blame his brother for his predicament. Pragmatically, the interrogatives were meant to confront Cain and help him identify the source of his emotional state. The question 'why are you angry' indirectly performs the speech act of alerting Cain about the lethal feelings lurking beneath the surface of his life. In addition, the question suggests that all kinds of ill-feelings such as rejection, jealousy, resentment, and humiliation were in his heart. Also, the utterance suggests an indirect offer of an opportunity to do right by way of correcting his motive and attitude toward the Speaker. The three questions indirectly address or explore the emotions of the addressee.

#### Datum 6: **Where is your brother? (Gen 4:9a)**

Question six above contains a structural presupposition and it is God's question to Cain concerning his brother, Abel, whom he (Cain) had murdered. If the question above had occurred in an ordinary context of daily language use, it would have been understood naturally as an utterance demanding the listener to provide information of the where about of his brother. But considering this question in a religious



discourse context between God and man certainly implies that much more was intended by the Speaker since He was not unaware of the murder committed by the listener. He asked this penetrating question to draw attention to Cain's failure in his social responsibility of being his brother's keeper. The question is a social one because it is hinged on relationship. The question presupposes that Cain had a brother who was in a place known to the addressee. Also, it presupposes an obvious indictment of Cain of the wrong against his brother. Indirectly, the question brought to light Cain's social failure which resulted from wrong emotions.

Datum 7: **“Am I my brother's keeper?” (Gen 4: 9b).**

In a response to God, Cain asked “Am I my brother's keeper”? Considering the question in the context of everyday conversation between friends or equals, it would be taken as a casual way of saying ‘you know where he is; so why are you asking me?’ However, the context of the discourse in which the utterance above is made required the human participant to be more respectful. Cain's question presupposes that he was not responsible for his brother's wellbeing. By this utterance, the speaker indirectly revealed his gross disregard to the Divine and his failure to his social responsibility. It revealed the highest form of insolence or disregard to the all-knowing One.

The indirect speech act performed by the interrogative is disrespect or lack of reverence. It is intended to blame and to get back at the Divine Participant for accepting one and rejecting the other. God's enquiry (where is your brother) attracted the most deviant response from Cain which indirectly revealed the extent to which he (Cain) was on the defensive. Cain's response to God's questions also showed the ill feelings bottled up within his heart and in his response jealousy, bitterness, contempt, flippancy and lack of remorse can be deduced.

## Conclusion

This study has shown how in language use questions can be crafted by participants to achieve specific purposes in different contexts. Simple utterances such as the interrogatives analysed above can have deeper pragmatic meanings. The study showed how questions can be used in communicative events to indirectly transmit messages which can be fully understood by taking into cognizance the context in which they occur. The study has also shown that questions in day-to-day conversations are employed to accomplish both direct and indirect speech acts. Similarly, speakers' choices of the forms of their interrogative utterances depend on their assumptions. Thus, interrogatives in texts and communication processes are vital means by which messages are reinforced in the minds of listeners. These questions appear simple structurally, but in the context of the discourse, they engage the listeners not just to provide answers but to pertinently question and examine their existence, actions and reactions as well as their consequences.

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