

Violating and Flouting of the Four Gricean Cooperative Maxims in Friends the American TV Series

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Abstract

Pragmatics, as a vast field of study, provides us with insights on how to make communication among speakers efficient. One of the ways by which speakers can have efficient and non-problematic conversations is cooperation among them. As far as cooperation is concerned, Grice has suggested the Cooperative Maxims Principles according to which, conversations can be analyzed. The present study focuses on the instances of violation and flouting of Grice's maxims in the American TV series "friends" (Series 1, scene 1; the one where Monica gets a new roommate). Grice's maxims which are the core of cooperative principle (CP) are suggested in order to shape a better and clearer conversation. In some eccentric cases, though, the flouting of these maxims will create an effect. This effect is created in this movie series as well, and gives it an air of comedy. Among other genres, comedies have this capability to flout or violate the Gricean maxims for the creation of laughter, and also fun making. This is the reason that encouraged the researcher to select this genre. For this purpose, 4 excerpts of this TV series has been identified for a detailed analysis and description. The findings and analyses suggest that among the four maxims of quality, quantity, manner, and relevance, the one which is violated most, is the maxim of relevance, the one which is flouted the most is the maxim of quality. The amount that each character caused a flout is almost evenly distributed; except for Monica, who compared to other characters, did not very much flouted or violated the maxims and this may be due to the fact that she formed the story in the first episode and others created laughter and reacted on what she is going on to do.

Key Words: Grice Maxims, Violation, Flouting, Cooperative Principle, Comedy, Friends.

Introduction

Human communication depends to large extents on spoken language. People engage in conversations in order to exchange different kinds of information. For a successful communication interlocutors need to cooperate with each other so that they can understand what they say and what they mean. This cooperation, is what Grice (1975) has referred to as "cooperative principles" (CP). Grice described the cooperative principle as follows:

Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Cited in Thomas, 1995, pp. 61-62).

CP consists of the four maxims of quantity, quality, manner, and relevance. Based on Grice (1975) each maxim respectively means: be truthful, provide as much information as required, be relevant, Avoid unnecessary ambiguity.

These maxims impose some restrictions by which speakers regulate their conversations and based on Terkourafi they set forward the mechanism that language users should follow in order to understand each other in so many instances when meanings and intentions are not explicitly conveyed (Terkourafi, 2005). Although Grice's explanations of these cooperative rules asks interlocutors to abide in conversations, he affirms that these rules may not be followed in some cases (Grice, 1975). However, this violation is not an indicator of a breakdown of interaction (Levinson, 1983, p. 109).

More often than not, people fail to observe the maxims, be it deliberately or accidentally. Two of such failing to observe maxims are: violation and flouting of maxims. The *violation* of maxims is when the maxims are deliberately manipulated so that the speaker mislead the interlocutor. In struggling to clearly define these notions Paltridge puts forward an example as: when a mother tells her children "Mummy's gone on a little holiday because she needs a rest" (Paltridge, 2006, p. 65). In this example, the mother has not said she is going away to think about divorce of her husband. But instead, she violates the maxim of quality, meaning that she is not telling the truth. Levinson asserts that unlike the violation of maxims, which takes place to cause misunderstanding on the part of the listener, the *flouting* of maxims occurs when individuals intentionally do not apply the maxims in order to persuade their listeners to derive the hidden meaning behind what is said, that is, the speakers employ implicature (Levinson, 1983). In the same vein, Paltridge (2006) also believes that when someone is flouting a maxim, they are not *deliberately* trying to deceive or mislead their interlocutors, but they are deliberately not *observing* the maxims, in order for the interlocutors to understand another set of meaning (p. 65). The flouting of a maxim can also be used for comic effect. The following, is an example where comedy is created as a result of flouting the maxim. A husband complains about his wife's constant nagging and the wife replies to his comment.

Husband: Your nagging goes right in one ear and out the other.

Wife: That's because there is nothing between to stop it (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 274).

In the above example, the wife's answer is a kind of flouting of maxims. She neither wants to mislead nor hide something from her husband, but she is deliberately not observing the maxim to imply something. Here, the wife, by saying: "That's because there is nothing between to stop it", wants to create this implicature for her husband that there is no brain in between (he does not have a brain) that can analyze what the wife says.

Violating and flouting of maxims can be used for the creation of humor or comic effect. Humor is defined "the quality in something that makes it funny or amusing; the ability to laugh at things that are amusing." (Oxford Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, Sixth edition, p. 863) it is moreover defined as: "the quality in something that makes it funny: "amusement" or "the ability to understand and enjoy funny situations or to laugh at things" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, p. 698).

The two above definitions stress on two notions of "something that is funny" and also "the ability one has in understanding humor". In flouting the maxims for example, one assumes the implicature s/he wants to create in his interlocutor is understandable for him. Thus humor is one level upper than normal speech in that it is indirectly stating something by which it expect to create an effect in the other party.

Literature review

Humor, with regard to Grice's cooperative principles, has been treated from a variety of aspects in different studies. Some studies concerning the violation and flouting of Grice's maxims have been conducted in the realm of humor and comedy among which we may refer to Khosravizade and Sadevandi (2011) who investigated this issue in the movie *the Dinner for Schmucks*. This study focused on the speech of two main characters Barry and Tim. This study makes a close link between a character's social status and the amount of his talk. The lower the social status represented in Barry, the more flouting and violation of the maxim of quantity. Tupan and Natalia (2008) also in their study, investigated the multiple violations of characters in *Desperate Housewives* TV series, hired Grice's cooperative principles. They focused on the concept of lying introduced and developed by Christoffersen 2005 (cited in Tupan and Natalia, 2008). The purpose of this study was to analyze the reasons why such violations take place as well as to eliminate interlocutors' chance to respond. They found some instances where violations caused the truth to be covered. Other researchers (e.g: Kalliomaki, 2005; xiao-hong, 2007) further examined conversational exchanges in different movies and came up with interesting results. Kalliomaki who studied and analyzed the TV series *Blackadder* reached to this result that humor in this program is largely a sort of intentional misuse of language. He further maintains that the main strategies which contributed to this language misuse were the violations of the maxims of manner and quality which gave rise to some language using techniques like repartee, insults, sarcasm, lies and absurdity. Kalliomaki believes that humor gave a negative flavor to this TV series.

Research Question

This study wants to answer the following research question:

Which Grice's cooperative maxims are violated and flouted by different characters in *friends*, the American TV series?

Model

For the sake of data analysis, the present study utilizes Grice's cooperative maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. Grice (1975) defines each maxim as:

Maxim of Quantity

1. Provide as much information as required.
2. Do not provide more information than is required.

Maxim of Quality

1. Be truthful.
2. Only say that for which you have adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relevance

1. Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid unnecessary ambiguity.
3. Be brief.
4. Be orderly.

There are some instances where characters intentionally (flout) or unintentionally (violate) do not adhere to these maxims. This is done, mainly to create laughter. The violating and flouting of these maxims play an important role in providing powerful comedies such as *friends*, a popular American TV series which attracted so many fans so far.

Data

To show the violation and flouting of Grice's cooperative maxims, comedies would provide a good data. As one of the highest rated American sitcoms broadcast from 1994 to 2004 a lot of vivid images from *friends* still lingers in the audience's mind until today. This sitcom revolves around the relationship among six friends (Joey, Chandler, Ross, Monica, Phoebe, and Rachel) in New York. These six characters have been friends for over 10 years and get together and chat about trivial things in their daily lives. Holmes and Marra (2002) suggested that humor which resulted from the violation of cooperative maxims often occurs in the conversation among friends and colleges. For these reason, '*friends*' comedy series is chosen. The analysis centers on series 1, section 1. The first episode is chosen for analysis where Monica wants to meet a new guy and she tells her friends about it. Rachel, a friend of Monica, also enters in this episode and she, along with other characters do some violation and flouting which creates so much laughter on the part of the audience.

Data Analysis

The following table shows the results of counting the number of violating and flouting of Grice's maxims by each character in one episode of *friends*:

Table 1. Violating and flouting the Gricean maxims

Characters	Maxim of quantity		Maxim of quality		Maxim of manner		Maxim of relevance	
	violating	flouting	Violating	flouting	violating	flouting	violating	flouting
Joey	1	1	-	2	1	1	1	-
Chandler	-	-	1	2	-	-	4	-
Ross	3	1	1	-	1	-	1	-
Monica	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
Phoebe	2	-	-	1	-	-	3	-
Rachel	2	-	1	1	1	2	-	2
Total	8	2	3	7	4	3	9	2
Total (violating & flouting together)	10		10		7		11	

As Table 1 shows the maxim of relevance with allocating 11 times of occurrence is the most flouted/violated maxim in this episode as it is violated/flouted by all the characters except Monica and Rachel. The other maxims which are equally violated/flouted are maxims of quantity and quality with 10 times of occurrence. If separately considered, in the violating of maxims, the highest number is 7, where the maxim of quality has been violated; meaning that characters avoided to be truthful or say something they sure of. And the highest number in flouting is for the maxim of relevance meaning that characters created humor by being irrelevant or pushing an irrelevant subject. For a more detailed discussion, some (transcribed) excerpts of this movie are provided so that some cases of violations and floutings of the maxims are evident.

Before entering the discussion related to the analysis of the data, it may be essential to draw some borders between violating and flouting again. As it was said in the introduction, violating the maxims happens when a person says something not for creating any effect in the other person, but for hiding something or deceiving someone. But in the case of flouting maxims what one person says needs to be understood by the other person. And the doer of that flout, presupposes an understanding on the part of the listener. For both violating and flouting of maxims, the four maxims of quantity, quality, manner, and relevance are exemplified and elaborated on. Some lines or phrases are made bold in some excerpts; this is done by the researcher for more emphasis and catching the readers' notice for the critical parts in the analysis. With these in mind, we may start the analysis, first with violating of the maxims.

Excerpt 1. Violating the maxim of 'quantity' and 'manner'

Monica: So you wanna tell us now, or are we waiting for four wet bridesmaids?

Rachel: Oh God... well, it started about a half hour before the wedding. I was in the room where we were keeping all the presents, and I was looking at this gravy boat. This really gorgeous Lamauge gravy boat. When all of a sudden- (to the waitress that brought her coffee) Sweet 'n' Lo?- I realized that I was more turned on by this gravy boat than by Barry! And then I got really freaked out, and that's when it hit me: how much Barry looks like Mr. Potato Head. Y' know, I mean, I always knew looked familiar, but... Anyway, I just had to get out of there, and I started wondering 'Why am I doing this, and who am I doing this for?'. (to Monica) So anyway I just didn't know where to go, and I know that you and I have kinda drifted apart, but you're the only person I knew who lived here in the city.

Monica: Who wasn't invited to the wedding.

Rachel: Ooh, I was kinda hoping that wouldn't be an issue... [Scene: Monica's Apartment, everyone is there and watching a Spanish Soap on TV and are trying to figure out what is going on.]

Rachel, the new character who enters the scene at this moment wearing a wet bride's dress (because it was raining out), is frightened, bewildered, and searching till she finds Monica, her close friend. She sits and Monica asks her to explain what has happened. In a long dialogue, Rachel explains the reason she escaped her marriage and all that happened to her. This is a long dialogue and the way she explains it, is funny of course. Her description of the events she encountered could be shorter and clearer. It can be said the maxim of quantity is violated here because instead of providing enough information, so much information with unnecessary details are provided. Furthermore, because of the not being brief and orderly (instances 3 & 4 of the maxim of manner), it can be said that the maxim of manner is violated as well.

Excerpt2. Violating the maxim of 'quantity'

Phoebe: Ooh! Oh! (She starts to pluck at the air just in front of Ross.)

Ross: No, no don't! Stop cleansing my aura! No, just leave my aura alone, okay?

In this excerpt, Phoebe and Ross are talking and acting for something which is not there. Ross has arrived and he takes a seat on the sofa. Phoebe sit near him and starts to pluck at the air just in front of Ross. What they do is not observable for the audience and this is weird. This leads us to think they are somehow lying about a situation or a reality which does not exist neither for other characters nor for other audience. It seems that only Phoebe and Ross can see this 'aura'. When Ross asks Phoebe 'stop cleansing my aura' and to leave him alone, he is also assuming a prefabricated situation by which they could create laughter.

Excerpt 3. Violating the maxim of 'relevance'

Monica: There's nothing to tell! He's just some guy I work with!

Joey: C'mon, you're going out with the guy! There's gotta be something wrong with him!

Chandler: All right Joey, be nice. **So does he have a hump? A hump and a hairpiece?**

Phoebe: Wait, does he eat chalk?

(They all stare, bemused.)

In this part, Monica tells her friends that she is going to meet a guy she works with. The irrelevant expressions, as it is evident from the excerpt, are Chandler and Phoebe (they are made bold). Chandler talks of 'hump' and a 'hairpiece' and Phoebe of 'chalk'. Between these two, Phoebe's expression seem more weird and irrelevant as it is mentioned in the transcript that all other interlocutors stared. This is actually a part of humor making which plays an important role in arousing others' laughter. According to the table above, violating relevance is one of the highest numbers and it is repeated 9 times by all the characters.

Excerpt 4. Flouting the maxim of 'quantity'

Monica: Are you okay, sweetie?

Ross: I just feel like someone reached down my throat, grabbed my small intestine, pulled it out of my mouth and tied it around my neck...

Here is where Ross enters with an umbrella with a sad, pensive look. His sister, Monica, asks him whether he is ok or not. His answer is a long one as far as a suitable, necessary answer is concerned. This is a case of not adhering to the maxim of 'quantity' and because it creates an implicature in the other interlocutors it is a flouting one. This implicature can be the kind of feeling Ross wants to create in his friends, and also the need he has for his friends' sympathy.

Excerpt 5. Flouting the maxim of 'quality'

Rachel: Look Daddy, it's my life. Well maybe I'll just stay here with Monica.

Monica: Well, I guess we've established who's staying here with Monica...

Rachel: Well, maybe that's my decision. Well, **maybe I don't need your money.** Wait!! Wait, I said maybe!!

This is where Rachel talks with her father on the phone and tells him about the independence she yearns for. This is when she says: "maybe I don't need your money", the bold expression. What Rachel says is not true. Actually she has flouted the maxim of quality by not providing correct information about her financial status. By this flout, she wanted to create an implicature in her father and tells him she is no more dependent on him and the money he gives her. Flouting of maxim of quality is repeated 7 times in this scene totally, which may signify the utility and use of this technique for producing comedy.

Excerpt 6. Flouting the maxim of 'manner'

Rachel: C'mon Daddy, listen to me! It's like, it's like, all of my life, everyone has always told me, 'You're a shoe! You're a shoe, you're a shoe, you're a shoe!'. And today I just stopped and I said, 'What if I don't

wanna be a shoe? What if I wanna be a- a purse, y'know? Or a- or a hat! No, I'm not saying I want you to buy me a hat, I'm saying I am a ha- It's a metaphor, Daddy!

Rachel is again talking to her father on the phone. She is complaining to her father about the impositions that have been on her until now. She uses words like 'shoe', 'hat', and 'purse' for explaining and exemplifying herself with her situations and the things which are imposed on her, maybe by her parents. At first glance, what she says may not be digestible for the audience and cause them to think she is going mad. This repetition of 'you're a shoe', or saying that she is a hat or a purse makes audience laugh. This excerpt is a conspicuous example of flouting the maxim of manner because of the unorderedly, unclear, ambiguous, skimpy, and non-brief way of talk. This is again a flout, because Rachel wanted to create an implicature in her father; the implicature that she wants to create in that she wants to live the way she want (and for that she used some metaphors, as she herself said in the transcriptions), but she failed and this is where laughter is aroused.

Excerpt 7. Flouting the maxim of relevance

Ross: I don't want to be single, okay? I just... I just- I just- I just wanna be married again!
 (Rachel enters in a wet wedding dress and starts to search the room.)

Chandler: And I just want a million dollars! (He extends his hand hopefully.)

This excerpt focuses on the maxim of relevance and we see how it is flouted. Ross is desperate and wishes to be married again so that he does not feel alone and sad anymore. As soon as he says this, Rachel enters with her wedding dress. By seeing her, Chandler made a wish: 'And I just want a million dollars!'. His statement is completely irrelevant to what Ross was saying. Chandler, by being irrelevant, implied that Ross's wish came true and he may marry a ready-made bride! So he made a wish to see if it comes true. His statement is a flout of relevance maxim because he actually did not want to change the topic or show disinterestedness in what Ross was saying. He said his wish, to create an implicature in his other friends that oh Ross's wish (may) have come true.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was set to reveal the instances of violating and flouting of Grice's cooperative maxims in *friends*, a comedy in which the characters chat about their daily events among some friends. As Holms and Mar state one can find many instances of humor in conversations between friends and colleges (Holms & Mar, 2002). In line with some studies carried out to investigate the overall concept that the violation or flouting of Gricean maxims can create humor, this study also found this general result. This humor creation is reflected differently and from different aspect in different studies. For instance in Khosravizade and Sadevandi (2011) focused on the fact that the less the social status, the more the flouting or violation of the maxim of quantity would occur by a character. The present study is in line with this study in that they both investigate violation and flouting and they both came to the conclusion that such violations and floutings contribute to humor creation. Though, what was not considered in the present study, was the social status of its characters and that is because of the nature of this program, since all are friends and are nearly of the same rank and social position. The present study emphasized the four maxims which were more or less violated or flouted by all the characters mainly for creating laughter. This is of course done in delicate situations like when characters wanted to show they are idiots or pretending they are ignorant, as well as to create a kind of irony or sarcasm in their speech. This is what Kalliomaki (2005) has confirmed in his study when he concludes that language plays and language misuses are done by characters where they flout the maxims of quality and manner and this consequently gives rise to some language using techniques like repartee, insults, sarcasm, lies and absurdity.

Violation and flouting was found in all four Grice's maxims, though some were more and some less. The most violated/flouted maxims as the results show are the maxims of: relevance (11 times), quality and quantity (both 10 times), and manner (7 times), respectively. What can be concluded from the findings of this study suggest that although Grice's cooperative maxims are there for a smooth, unproblematic interaction among interlocutors, sometimes they can be disobeyed in order to create an effect. In *friends* the disobeying of the maxims, as it was demonstrated in the data analysis section, causes laughter on the part of the audience.

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