

THE NON – OBSERVANCE OF GRICEAN MAXIMS IN THE MOVIE SERIES

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Najih Suraya

INTISARI

Penelitian ini meneliti tentang ketidaktaatan terhadap maksim-maksim Grice dalam film serial Sherlock Holmes. Secara khusus, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengklasifikasikan flouting dari maksim yang ditemukan dalam film tersebut. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah dialog yang berisi ungkapan ketidaktaatan terhadap maksim-maksim Grice. Hasil dari skripsi ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 75 kasus flouting dari maksim-maksim Grice: 20 (26,6%) kasus menunjukkan flouting maksim kualitas, 8 (10,6%) flouting maksim kuantitas, 17 (22,6%) flouting maksim relevansi, 20 (26,6%) flouting maksim cara, dan 10 (13,3%) flouting dari kombinasi maksim. Dalam penelitian ini ditemukan bahwa flouting dari maksim kualitas dan maksim cara dianggap sebagai strategi yang paling umum digunakan oleh penutur dalam film.

Kata kunci: konteks, tindak tutur, implikatur, prinsip kerjasama, ketaatan, dan ketidaktaatan terhadap maksim-maksim Grice.

ABSTRACT

This research attempts to investigate the non-observance of Gricean maxims in the movie series *Sherlock Holmes*. In particular, it attempts to identify and classify the flouting of the maxims found in the movie. The data used in this research are dialogues containing expressions of the non-observance of Gricean maxims. Based on the data analysis, 75 cases of the flouting of Gricean maxims were found: 20 (26.6 %) cases showed the flouting of the quality maxim, 8 (10.6%) the flouting of the quantity maxim, 17 (22.6%) the flouting of the relevance maxim, 20 (26.6 %) the flouting of the manner maxim, and 10 (13.3%) the flouting of a combination of maxims. It was found in this research that the flouting of the quality maxim and the flouting of the manner maxim are considered as most commonly used strategies in the movie.

Keywords: context, speech acts, implicature, cooperative principle, observance, and non-observance of Gricean maxims

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the act of sharing or imparting a share of anything, a sharing of ideas and feelings in a mutual understanding (Gartside 1986:1). According to Grice (1975), to achieve a successful communication, participants must be cooperative with each other, so the speaker and the hearer are able to understand what they mean. A person can be said to cooperate if he speaks sincerely, relevantly, and clearly providing sufficient information while exchanging verbal information without any additional meaning generated. According to Grice the term that describes cooperative communication is the observance of conversational principles of maxims.

However, in the use of language in everyday communication, it turns out that sometimes people do not cooperate with each other because they are incapable of speaking clearly or because they deliberately choose to lie (Grice 1975: 49). A person can be said to be uncooperative if he speaks untruthfully, irrelevantly, provides ambiguity, and gives more or less information than required with additional meaning generated during a conversation. According to Grice the term that describes the uncooperative communication is the non-observance of maxims.

It is interesting to investigate how in a conversation someone may choose not to cooperate, and the meaning behind the uncooperative communication. Therefore, this research attempts to investigate the non-observance of Gricean maxims found in the movie series *Sherlock Holmes*, in particular it addresses the question “what conversational maxims are flouted in the movie”.

This research investigates the non-observance of Gricean maxims in the movie series *Sherlock Holmes* according to the theory of conversational maxims proposed by Grice (1975). The data were

analyzed pragmatically for the identification and classification of the flouting of the maxims in the movie. No attempts were made to analyze the data phonologically and syntactically.

The data source of this research is the subtitle of *Sherlock Holmes BBC Series First Episode: A Study of Pink*, which was published in 2010 by Subscene, and accessed on 14 July 2013. The data used in this research are dialogues containing expressions of the non-observance of Gricean maxims. There are five major ways of failing to observe a maxim: flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, and suspending. The main concern in this research is the flouting of the maxims. Observation method is used in the data collection process. The data are analyzed based on the flouting of the quality maxim, the quantity maxim, the relevance maxim, the manner maxim, and the flouting of a combination of maxims.

SPEECH ACTS

People do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, but also perform actions via those utterances. Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts (Austin 1962). Both the speaker and the hearer are usually helped in the process of speech act by the circumstances surrounding the utterances.

According to Yule (1996), speech acts can be classified by their directness into direct speech acts and indirect speech acts. Whenever there is a direct relationship between a structure and its function, it is called a direct speech act. Whenever there is an indirect relationship between a structure and a function, it is an indirect speech act.

Formally, based on the mood, a sentence is divided into declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Declarative is conventionally used to make a statement,

interrogative to ask something, and imperative to give commands. If the sentence is used according to its function, it will form a direct speech act, but if the sentence is not used in accordance with its function, it will form the indirect speech act. Below are examples illustrating direct and indirect speech acts.

(1) It's cold outside (Yule 1996: 55).

(2) I hereby request of you that you close the door. (Yule 1996: 55).

The sentence (1) 'It's cold outside' is a direct speech act, because it is a statement of the weather outside. The sentence is used in accordance with its function as a declarative, which shows a direct relationship between the form and the function. However, a declarative form such as (2) 'I hereby request of you that you close the door' may have the function of a command or request. When a declarative sentence is used to make a command or request, it functions as an indirect speech act.

Moreover, the table below represents the form of sentence in accordance with its function in speech acts by Wijana (1996: 32) modified by the researcher.

Table 1. The form – function relationship in speech acts

Form	Speech Acts	
	Direct	Indirect
Declarative	Statement	Command/ Request
Interrogative	Question	Command/ Request
Imperative	Command	Request

From the table above, it can be concluded that both declarative and interrogative can indirectly function as command or request, and imperative can indirectly function as a request.

Because this study focuses on the non-observance of Gricean maxims, indirect speech acts play a very important role in the non-observance of the maxims

which are often expressed through the use of indirect speech acts. Indirectness is a phenomenon employed in language use which means that the meaning conveyed by the speaker is not delivered directly. The message carries more than what is explicitly said or written as far as the expressed and implied meanings are concerned. Indirectness arises when "the speaker's utterance and the sentence meaning come apart in various ways" (Searle 1975: 59). Thomas (1995: 119-120) says that indirectness occurs when the expressed meaning and the implied meaning mismatch.

People usually employ indirectness when talking to each other because they want to obtain some advantages or avoid some negative consequences. A speaker may want the hearer to do something for him in a polite way, so the speaker uses an indirect way to express the intention. People also use indirect strategies when they want to make their speech more interesting, when they want to reach goals different from their partners' or when they want to increase the force of the message communicated (Thomas 1995: 143). Using indirectness generates additional meaning, which is called implicature.

IMPLICATURE

Implicature is a theoretical construction which was first introduced by Grice in William James Lectures in 1975. Grice used the concept to deal with examples in communication when a speaker uses a particular utterance to express something that goes beyond the literal meaning (Grice 1989). When the hearer hears an expression, he first has to assume that the speaker is being cooperative and wants to communicate something. However, the expression conveyed has an additional meaning which is called implicature. Implicatures are

primary examples of more being communicated than is said, but in order for them to be interpreted, cooperative principle must first be assumed to be in operation (Yule 1996: 35-36).

COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

To achieve a successful conversation, participants must be cooperative with each other while exchanging verbal information and observing the cooperative principle. The cooperative principle is “Make your conversational 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” (Grice 1989: 26).

Grice developed the concept of conversational implicature. To Grice, conversational implicature is realized through the four maxims under the general principle of conversation, and each has its own rules. Four basic maxims distinguished by Grice (1975: 45) are:

1. The maxim of Quantity
 - Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)
 - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
2. The maxim of Quality
 - Try to make your contribution one that is true.
 - Do not say what you believe to be false
 - Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
3. The maxim of Relation
 - Be relevant.
4. The maxim of Manner
 - Be perspicuous.
 - Avoid obscurity of expression
 - Avoid ambiguity
 - Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
 - Be orderly

According to Grice, to achieve a successful communication, participants must be cooperative with each other by observing the conversational maxims. Observing a maxim means that participants, both speaker and hearer, have to communicate in an efficient, rational, and cooperative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information. Grice (1975: 48) points out that a speaker can certainly observe all the maxims, as shown in the following example:

(3) Jerry : Hi. How are you?
We're interested in a single room. How much will that be?

Receptionist : A single room is \$ 200 a night.

(Alvato 2011: 35-36)

The receptionist has answered clearly (manner), truthfully (quality), has given just the right amount of information (quantity) and has directly addressed Jerry's goal in asking the question (relation). The receptionist has said precisely what he means, no more and no less and has generated no implicature. There is no distinction to be made here between what he says and what he means; there is no additional meaning (Alvato 2011: 36).

Wijana (1996: 46-52) explains that in making a communication process run smoothly, cooperation is required between the speaker and the hearer. The maxim of quantity requires that each participant contributes as much as needed. The maxim of quality requires that each participant tell the truth, based on the evidence. The maxim of relevance requires that each participant contribute relevant information with the conversation goal. The maxim of manner requires that each participant speaks directly in a conversation, without being ambiguous and excessive.

However, sometimes people do not cooperate with each other and do not observe the conversational maxims. Non-

observance of the maxim is defined as a failure to observe the maxims. The failure may be either blatant or unostentatious. Moreover, people fail to observe or fulfill the maxims on many occasions perhaps because they are incapable of speaking clearly (they are nervous, frightened, have a stammer) or because they deliberately choose to lie (Grice 1975: 49).

In the case of non-observance of a maxim, a competent hearer can draw one of several possible conclusions:

1. The speaker is openly ‘opting out’ from the operation of the maxim and is unwilling to abide by the cooperative principle.
2. The speaker is deliberately and secretly subverting the maxim and the cooperative principle, usually for some self-serving purpose. This constitutes an instance of maxim violation.
3. The speaker means to observe the cooperative principle, but fails to fulfill a particular maxim through ineptitude. For example, he may ineptly use words too technical for the audience and occasion, thus inadvertently non-observing the maxim of manner. This is an instance of maxim infringement.
4. The speaker presumably means to observe the cooperative principle, and yet he is blatantly not observing a maxim; if he is not inept, he must mean something additional to what he is saying. Flouting is understood as a case of verbal communication when “we can make a blatant show of breaking one of the maxims... in order to lead the addressee to look for a covert, implied meaning” (Yule 1996: 70).
5. In certain situations it is not necessary to observe the maxims, because there are certain events in which there is no expectation on the

part of any participant that they will be fulfilled (hence the non-fulfillment does not generate any implicatures). Such cases include: suspending the quality maxim in case of funeral orations and obituaries, poetry suspends the manner maxim since it does not aim for conciseness, clarity and lack of ambiguity. In the case of speedy communication via telegrams, e-mails, notes, the quantity maxim is suspended because such means are functional owing to their brevity. Moreover, jokes are not only conventionally untrue, ambiguously and seemingly incoherent, but are expected to exploit ambiguity, polysemy and vagueness of meaning, which entails, among other things, suspension of the maxims of quality, quantity, and manner.

THE FLOUTING OF GRICEAN MAXIMS IN THE MOVIE SERIES *SHERLOCK HOLMES*

Based on the data analysis, 75 cases of the flouting of Gricean maxims are found: 20 cases show the flouting of the quality maxim, 8 the flouting of the quantity maxim, 17 the flouting of the relevance maxim, 20 the flouting of the manner maxim, and 10 the flouting of a combination of maxims. Table 2 below summarizes the results of the data analysis in terms of the flouting of the maxims in the movie series *Sherlock Holmes*.

Table 2. The Frequency of the flouting of Gricean maxims in the movie series *Sherlock Holmes*

No	Maxim Flouting	Total	
		No	%
1.	Quality Maxim	20	26.6
2.	Quantity Maxim	8	10.6
3.	Relevance Maxim	17	22.6
4.	Manner Maxim	20	26.6
5.	Combination	10	13.3
Total		75	100

The table shows that the flouting of Gricean maxims is dominated by the flouting of the quality and manner maxims with 26.6 % each. Next, the flouting of the relevance maxim is 22.6% which is slightly below the flouting of the quality and manner maxims. The flouting of a combination of maxims is 13.3% and the flouting of the quantity maxim is 10.6% which is found to have the least contribution.

The sections below discuss each of the categories in detail.

THE FLOUTING OF THE QUALITY MAXIM

The flouting of the quality maxim occurs when the speaker says something which is and needs to be perceived as blatantly untrue. This is done intentionally by the speaker in order to imply an additional meaning. The speaker may flout the maxim of quality in several ways: may simply say something about what he does not have enough evidence for, by exaggerating, as in hyperbole, and by using metaphors and irony. The speaker may quite simply say something that obviously does not represent what he thinks. Below is the example of the flouting of the quality maxim.

(4) 00:01:28,040 - 00:01:30,240 (QL 1)

Dr. Watson is an ex-army doctor injured in the war in Afghanistan. Because

of his injury, Watson has a psychotherapist to help him get into civil life. His psychotherapist encourages him to start writing everything that happens to him in his personal blog as a means to cope with his stress symptoms and his trust issues. One day, Watson meets with his therapist in the therapist’s office to consult about his post traumatic syndrome. The therapist asks him about his personal blog.

Therapist : How's your blog going?
 Watson : Yeah good. Very good.

Watson chooses to lie by saying that his blog is good, but actually, he has not written anything in it. He is being indirect when he lies “*Yeah good. Very good*”. His indirectness occurs when the expressed meaning and the implied meaning mismatch, in this case the expressed meaning is the opposite of the implied meaning. The maxim of quality says that a conversation will be successful if the speaker and the hearer cooperate with each other. Each participant should try to tell the truth. However, Watson fails to observe or fulfill the quality maxim because he deliberately chooses to lie that his blog is going good rather than telling the truth that he has not written anything in his personal blog.

THE FLOUTING OF THE QUANTITY MAXIM

The flouting of the quantity maxim happens when a speaker blatantly gives more or less information than required; he may flout the quantity maxim and deliberately talk either too much or too little in compliance with the goal of the ongoing conversation. Needless to say, this happens blatantly and an implicature is generated. Below is an example of the flouting of the quantity maxim.

(5) 00:08:26,560 - 00:08:37,120 (QT 1)

In the morgue of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, Sherlock Holmes is performing an experiment by beating a

corpse with a whip to prove an alibi. Molly, his assistant is standing near him. He asks Molly about the time of death of the corpse.

Sherlock : How fresh?
Molly: *Just in. 67, natural causes. Used to work here. I knew him, he was nice.*

Sherlock : Fine.

According to the quantity maxim, a conversation will be successful if the participants observe the quantity maxim by making their contribution as informative as is required and no more informative than is required. When Sherlock asks Molly about the time of death, Molly answers with more information than he requires, but not only telling him about the time of death but also the personality of the man before his death. Molly's answer does not observe the quantity of maxim because she gives more information to Sherlock than what he requires. The indirect strategy used by Molly is to make her speech more interesting because she wants to reach a different goal in the conversation. In this case, Molly tries to get Sherlock's attention.

THE FLOUTING OF THE RELEVANCE MAXIM

Flouting the relevance maxim tend to occur when the speaker's utterance does not have any relation with the previous one (abrupt change of topic, overt failure to address the interlocutor's goal in asking a question). He expects the hearer to be able to imagine what the utterance does not say and make the connection between utterances. However, this action of changing the conversation is not done randomly but in order to convey an extra meaning rather than the communicated meaning through the conversation. Below is an example of the flouting of the relevance maxim.

(6) 00:55:18,160 -
00:55:29,680 (R10)

Sherlock and Watson have just arrived in their flat in Baker Street after chasing a taxi whose passenger they think is the murderer of the serial suicides. The conversation happens while they are still at the entrance hall. Watson says that the chasing was the most ridiculous thing he had ever done. Then, Sherlock says that Watson invaded Afghanistan.

Watson : That was ridiculous. That was the most ridiculous thing... I've ever done.

Sherlock : *And you invaded Afghanistan.*

Sherlock's answer to Watson's statement about the most ridiculous thing he has ever done is not directly related. It flouts the maxim of relevance which tends to occur when the response is obviously irrelevant to the topic. There is no relation between chasing a taxi and invading Afghanistan. The meaning conveyed by Sherlock is not delivered directly. The message carries more than what is explicitly said.

THE FLOUTING OF THE MANNER MAXIM

Fundamentally, the maxim of manner is flouted when a speaker is being disorderly, vague, ambiguous, or wordy in his or her reply to the other party(ies). Flouting the manner maxim in most cases involve the absence of clarity, brevity and transparency of communicative intentions. Furthermore, this happens purposefully and the result is a generated implicature or an additional meaning rather than the communicated meaning. Below is an example illustrating the flouting of the manner maxim.

(7) 00:08:58,200 -
00:09:19,160 (M6)

In the morgue of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, Sherlock Holmes is performing an experiment by beating a corpse with a whip to prove an alibi. Molly, the laboratory assistant of the

hospital is accompanying him. Molly tries to ask Sherlock to have a date by using an unclear indirectness and pretends to have coffee with him. Ignoring the clumsy efforts of the mousy assistant to flirt with him, he answers her invitation by giving an unclear answer.

Molly Hooper : *Listen, I was wondering... maybe later, when you're finished—*

Sherlock : You're wearing lipstick. You weren't wearing lipstick before.

Molly Hooper : I uh, I refreshed it a bit.

Sherlock : Sorry, you were saying?

Molly Hooper : *I was wondering if you'd like to have coffee.*

Sherlock : Black. Two sugars please. I'll be upstairs.

Molly Hooper : Okay.

The indirect speech acts happen when Molly tries to invite Sherlock to have coffee with her or to have a date with her. But the meaning conveyed by Molly is not delivered directly and involve the absence of clarity and transparency of communicative intentions. The use of indirectness in Molly's utterance triggers the flouting of the manner maxim. Using indirectness by flouting the maxims of manner Molly tries to lead Sherlock to look for an implied meaning. Sherlock acts as if he fails to understand what Molly's says and intentionally refuses Molly's invitation.

THE FLOUTING OF A COMBINATION MAXIM

There are five flouting of a combination of maxims found in the research. They are: the flouting of a combination of (a) quantity and manner maxims, (b) quality and relevance maxims, (c) quality and quantity maxims, (d) relevance and manner maxims, (e) relevance, quality, and manner maxims. Below is the example illustrating the

flouting of the quality and relevance maxims.

(8) 01:21:54,440 -
01:23:00,920 (C8)

Outside Roland-Kerr Further Education College, Scotland Yard has surrounded the perimeter and Sherlock is wearing a shock blanket, since he is being treated for shock. Lestrade questions Sherlock about the shooter of the taxi driver and he starts to make some deductions before realizing it must be Watson. He turns to Lestrade and pretends to be ranting nonsense because of the shock and rejoins Watson outside the police lines.

Sherlock : So, the shooter. No sign?

Lestrade : Cleared off before we got here. But a guy like that would have had enemies, I suppose. One of them could have been following him, but... we've got nothing to go on.

Sherlock : Oh, I wouldn't say that.

Lestrade : OK. Give me.

Sherlock : The bullet they just dug out of the wall's from a handgun. A kill shot over that distance, that's a crack shot. But not just a marksman, a fighter. His hands couldn't have shaken at all so clearly he's acclimatized to violence. He didn't fire until I was in immediate danger though, so strong moral principle. *You're looking for a man probably with a history of military service, and... nerves of steel... Actually, do you know what? Ignore me. Sorry? Ignore all of that. It's just the er...the shock talking.*

Sherlock's explanation to Lestrade about the shooter is unfinished because he

suddenly realizes that Watson is the shooter, so he cuts his explanation and unconsciously changes his explanation into irrelevant words which flouts the maxim of relevance. He also deliberately chooses to lie that it is a shock talking and he persuades Lestrade to ignore him. Again, he flouts the maxim of quality which requires the speaker to tell the truth. He employs indirectness when suddenly changing the explanation because he wants to obtain some advantages or avoid some negative consequences. In this case, Sherlock who changes his explanation and lies, is doing it for the purpose of protecting Watson from the murder charges of the taxi driver.

CONCLUSION

This study deals with the non-observance of Gricean maxims in the movie series *Sherlock Holmes*. From the discussion in the previous chapter there are 75 data identified as the flouting of the maxims, classified into 20 flouting of the quality maxim, 8 flouting of the quantity maxim, 17 flouting of the relevance maxim, 20 flouting of the manner maxim, and 10 flouting a combination of the maxims.

Because this study focuses on the non-observance of Gricean maxims, in particular the flouting of the maxims, indirect speech acts play a very important role as the flouting of the maxims are often expressed through the use of indirect speech acts. Indirectness is a phenomenon employed in language use which means that the meaning conveyed by the speaker is not delivered directly. The additional meaning carries more than what is explicitly said or written as far as the meaning and the implied meaning is concerned.

It was found in this research that the flouting of the quality maxim and the flouting of the manner maxim are considered as most commonly used

strategy by the speakers. It can be concluded that in order to imply an additional meaning, a speaker either chooses something which does not represent what he thinks by lying, exaggerating as in hyperbole, using metaphors and irony or involves the absence of clarity, brevity and transparency of communicative intentions in compliance with the goal of the ongoing conversation.

People usually flout the Gricean maxims when talking to each other because they want to obtain some advantages or avoid some negative consequences. A speaker may want the hearer to do something for him, but in a polite way, so the speaker uses an indirect way to express the intention and chooses to flout the maxims as a strategy. People also use indirect strategies as in the flouting of the Gricean maxims when they want to make their speech more interesting, when they want to reach goals different from their partners' or when they want to increase the force of the message communicated.

This research focuses only on the flouting of the maxims. Further research on the same topic is highly suggested to support the result of this research. There are many other types of the non-observance of Gricean maxims that can be investigated further.

It is admitted that the significance of this research is limited only to the movie series *Sherlock Holmes*. But there is a possibility that the result of this research can be applied to other movies. However, further research is needed to confirm or refute this finding.

REFERENCES

- Alvato, Ramiro Nieto. 2011. *The Role of Conversational Maxims, Implicature and Presupposition in the Creation of humor: An Analysis of Woody Allen's Anything Else*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Gartside, L. 1986. *Modern Business Correspondence*. Jakarta: Bimapura Aksara.
- Grice, H. P. 1975. *Logic and Conversation*. In Cole, P & Morgan, J. (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics*, vol3. New York: Academic Press.
- Grice H. P. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Searle, John. 1975. *Indirect Speech Acts in Syntax and Semantics, 3: Speech Acts*, ed. P. Cole & J. L. Morgan, pp. 59–82. New York: Academic Press.
- Subscene. 2013. *Sherlock -First Season*: Red Bee Media Ltd. Accessed on July 14 2013 (<http://subscene.com/subtitles/sherlock-firstseason/english/581937>).
- Thomas, Jenny. 1995. *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. New York: Longman Group Limited.
- Wijana, I Dewa Putu. 1996. *Dasar – Dasar Pragmatik*. Yogyakarta: ANDI.
- Yule, George. 1996. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.