

Violations of Conversational Maxims in “American Murder: The Family Next Door” and Its Impact on Communication

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Abstract:

This research aims to identify and analyze violations of conversational maxims in the Netflix documentary *American Murder: The Family Next Door* and examine their impact on communication effectiveness. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with non-participatory observation data collection techniques. Data were analyzed based on Grice's Cooperative Principle theory, which includes four maxims: quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. The research results showed that there were 38 violations of the maxim of conversation in the documentary, with the violation of the maxim of quality being the most dominant (47.4%). The impact of this violation includes decreased trust, the emergence of misunderstandings, and disruption of regularity in communication. This research provides insight into the importance of compliance with conversational maxims to maintain communication effectiveness, especially in the context of documentaries which are expected to present information objectively and clearly.

Keywords: Maxim Violations; Effective Communication; Netflix Documentary; American Murder.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis pelanggaran maksim percakapan dalam dokumenter Netflix *American Murder: The Family Next Door* serta mengkaji dampaknya terhadap efektivitas komunikasi. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data observasi non-partisipatif. Data dianalisis berdasarkan teori Prinsip Kerja Sama Grice, yang mencakup empat maksim: kualitas, kuantitas, relevansi, dan cara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 38 pelanggaran maksim percakapan dalam dokumenter tersebut, dengan pelanggaran maksim kualitas sebagai yang paling dominan (47,4%). Dampak dari pelanggaran ini mencakup menurunnya kepercayaan, timbulnya kesalahpahaman, dan terganggunya keteraturan dalam komunikasi. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan tentang pentingnya kepatuhan terhadap maksim percakapan untuk menjaga keefektifan komunikasi, terutama dalam konteks dokumenter yang diharapkan menyajikan informasi secara objektif dan jelas.

Kata kunci: Pelanggaran Maksim; Komunikasi Efektif; Dokumenter Netflix; American Murder.

INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, human cannot be far from communicating. Communication is a process of conveying information or messages from the speaker to the hearer through certain means or media with certain goals and impacts. In communicating, the language used is certainly inseparable from human activities. Through language human can express feelings, convey thoughts and express opinions (Rahma, 2018). If the hearer does not misinterpret what the speaker says, then the conversation is said to be going well. Messages conveyed carefully in each discourse will generally be accepted if there is participation, known as conversational cooperative standards (Rahmawati, 2021). Therefore, in order for the communication process to run well and effectively, participants must pay attention to the rules applied in communication. Given this problem, Grice (1975) provides a principle, the Cooperative Principle. There are four maxims in this principle: quantity, quality, relationship, and manner. However, unfortunately violations of these principles still occur in some conversations, even though these principles have been clearly explained.

In writing this research, the author intends to identify and analyze violations of conversational maxims in a Netflix documentary, entitled *American Murder: The Family Next Door*, then examine the impact on the effectiveness of the communication contained in it. The focus in this research is on the types of maxim violations that most often occur in the documentary, as well as their implications for the flow of conversation.

This research is considered important because documentaries as an information medium are expected to convey events objectively and clearly. By revealing the frequency and impact of maxim violations in this documentary, this research is expected to provide a more in-depth view of the influence of non-compliance with communication principles in maintaining the smooth delivery of information. It is hoped that the research results will provide insight into the negative impact on the effectiveness of the communication presented.

In previous research, there have been many linguistic studies on the topic of violation of conversational maxims. These include research from Al-Zubeiry (2020), Nikita & Cynantia (2021), Arbain et al., (2023), and others. From these studies, similarities were found between previous studies and current research, namely the use of Grice's Cooperative Principles theory as a framework for analysis. The three of them also touched on violations of maxims that occurred in conversations on Arabic comedy, vlogs and

animations. However, the researcher are currently not researching from Arabic comedy, vlogs and animations, but from a Netflix documentary entitled American Murder: The Family Next Door. Furthermore, the researcher not only analyze maxim violations and their reasons as other researchers do, researcher also examine which maxims are most influential in effective communication. Thus, it is hoped that it can bring different and more specific research findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implicature

Grice first introduced the concept of implicature in order to solve problems of language meaning that cannot be resolved by ordinary semantic theory. If only rely on theory or understanding semantics, the meaning of a speech cannot be understood correctly. Inaccuracy of understanding the meaning of speech greatly impacts the achievement of communication goals. Communication goals is so that the message that the speaker wants to convey can be received properly right by the person speaking to them. “A statement can imply a proposition which is not part of the statement from the speech in question. The implied proposition is called an implicature” (Grice, 1975).

Grice in (Arezou & Ali, 2014) differentiates implicature into two types: conventional implicature and conversational implicature. The similarity between the two is the conveyance of an additional level of meaning, beyond the semantic meaning of the words spoken. However, both are slightly different in the relationship between the implicature and the context. Furthermore, according to Grice, conversational implicatures are essentially connected with certain general characteristics of discourse, namely the Cooperative Principle.

Cooperative Principle

The cooperative principle is described as an assumption that exists in a constructive conversation a common goal that is meaningful for both the speaker (S) and the hearer (H). Wijana & Rohmadi (2011) argue that speech participants can communicate because both have similar knowledge the same about what is being discussed. Therefore, the goals conveyed through their speech can be well received. But, there is there are times when the speaker's intentions and goals are not conveyed well by the hearer.

Grice (1975) stated that when the meaning is not conveyed that is what referred to as a violation of the cooperative principle. Besides, Grice suggests that speech participants

must fulfill the cooperative principle which are divided into four types of maxims. The maxim is a kind of rule that must be obeyed by speech participants in order to have good communication 10 effective based on (Levinson, 1983). In the cooperative principle there is several maxims mentioned by Grice are the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relevance, and the maxim of manner.

Violation of Conversational Maxim

In everyday communication, the application of cooperative principles can be divided into two ways, by observing or violating maxims. Activities that violating maxims can be divided into two, there are violating and flouting. Thomas in (Cutting, 2002) stated “The speaker violates the maxims actually knows that the listeners does not know the truth meaning from the conversation, and they violate with intentionally generate misleading implicature by giving insufficient information, says something wrong, irrelevant, or ambiguous therefore the listeners wrongly assumes when they doing conversation.” It means that the speaker who violates the maxim actually knows that the listener does not know the true meaning of the conversation and they violate conversational maxims intentionally, resulting in implicatures who mislead by providing inadequate information, said something wrong, irrelevant, or ambiguous. Therefore, the listener is mistaken assume the intention of the speaker's utterances when they do conversation.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is a social process of creating and interpret the meaning of messages accurately and clearly using symbols so that they can be easily understood by others. Effective communication can be interpreted as a process where someone influences the thoughts and behavior of others.

Communication can be said to be effective if the message is received and understood as intended by the sender of the message, message followed up with an act voluntarily by message recipients, can improve the quality of interpersonal relationships, and there are no obstacles. The source and recipient of communication must be the same system, if it is not the same, then communication will not be ever happened (Abdullah, 1984).

Previous Study

Previous research on violations of conversational maxims provides important insights into how Grice's principles of cooperation are applied and violated in various contexts. The first study by Arbain et al., (2023) highlighted maxim violations in the animated film Puss in Boots: The Last Wish, with an analysis of 51 examples of violations

covering all four of Grice's maxims. This study shows that characters often violate maxims to fulfill personal interests or maintain self-image, which enriches story dynamics and character development. Additionally, this study contributes to the field of storytelling in animation by highlighting the role of maxim violations in increasing audience engagement through complex characters and plots. However, the limitation of this research is the use of fictional dialogue, which, although it provides in-depth insight into character dynamics, is less applicable in more contextual and complex everyday conversations.

The second study by Nikita & Cynantia (2021) focuses on maxim violations in Jurnalrisa vlogs, which are real conversations on YouTube channels. Using qualitative observation methods, this study analyzes 10 examples of violations, especially in the maxims of quantity and relevance, to understand how these violations affect conversational coherence in informal contexts. The study identified that violations often occur because speakers attempt to avoid sensitive topics or steer the conversation in another direction, which can create confusion or communication inefficiencies. As a study that uses real conversations, this research is more representative in describing the dynamics of everyday communication. However, the small sample size and focus on a single vlog episode limits the generalization of the results of this study to broader conversational contexts, both in other media and in formal interactions.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this research, the method used is the descriptive analysis method, namely research that attempts to describe a symptom or incident systematically and accurately. Therefore, the data produced or recorded is data that is a portrait of what it is. This is in line with the opinion of Ratna (2006) who stated that the analytical descriptive method is carried out by describing the facts which are then followed by analysis. Qualitative research is research that intends to understand phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects, for example behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, by means of descriptions in the form of words or language in a special natural context and by utilizing various natural methods (Moleong, 2007). The analysis was carried out using a theoretical basis by Grice, then analyzed and interpreted in accordance with theoretical studies so that the research results can describe the problems studied in an objective, systematic manner based on the theory that the author used. Furthermore, this research uses a non-participatory observation method as a data collection tool, namely by watching the Netflix documentary entitled

American Murder: The Family Next Door and recording violations of conversational maxims that occur between the participants in the documentary. The observation method was chosen because it can capture verbal interactions in a natural conversational context. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher conducted repeated screenings of the documentary to confirm and verify every violation of the maxims recorded, especially in the categories of maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner.

The Research Procedure consists of three main stages:

- 1) Research Preparation: In the initial stage, the researcher chose and studied the basic theory used in this research, namely Grice's theory of cooperative principles. Researchers also study the context and plot of the documentary to understand the background of the conversation.
- 2) Data Collection: Data was collected by watching the documentary carefully and noting any maxim violations that occurred. Each violation is categorized according to the type of maxim violated, namely quantity, relevance, and manner. Recording is carried out in detail and systematically, by recording the time, conversation situation, and the impact of violations on the flow of communication. To maintain consistency, the documentary was re-watched to confirm any violations noted.
- 3) Data Analysis: Data was analyzed descriptively qualitatively with the aim of understanding the frequency and impact of each type of maxim violation on communication effectiveness. Analysis is carried out by grouping data according to the type of maxim that is violated and identifying patterns of violations that occur most frequently. The results were interpreted to assess the effect of maxim violations on the smoothness and clarity of communication between participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Grice's theory of conversational maxims in Cooperative Principles, researchers found 38 violations occurred in conversations in the Netflix documentary, American Murder: The Family Nextdoor. There are four types of maxim violations committed by the characters in the story. The researchers created a table to collect all the data.

Table 1. The Frequency of Violations of Cooperative Principle in American Murder: The Family Next Door

Types of Violation	Occurrence in Conversations	Percentage
Maxim of Quality	18	47.4%
Maxim of Quantity	12	31.6%
Maxim of Relevance	5	13.2%
Maxim of Manner	3	7.9%
Total	38	100%

Types of Maxim Violations

The research data that has been obtained is then classified and analyzed to see to what extent Grice's cooperative principles are used in the Netflix documentary. Grice divided 4 cooperative principles; 1) maxim of quantity, 2) maxim of relevance, 3) maxim of manner. Below are each examples of maxim violations that the author has found in Netflix documentary which are also answers to the first research question.

Violation of Maxim Quality

Based on the maxim of quality, a speaker is considered to have violated the maxim of quality if the speaker makes a statement that is untrue, dishonest, or inconsistent in conveying something. The data transcription analysis results from the conversation between Chris (A) and the police (B).

B: "So, um, it is completely clear that you were not honest during the testing, and I think you already know that. Um, you did not pass the polygraph test."

A: "I didn't... I didn't lie to you on that polygraph, I promise".

A: "I'm... I'm not..."

This scene occurs when Chris's polygraph test results come out. Initially, Chris was shocked to see the results of the test which showed that he failed the polygraph test. However, the police clearly knew better about Chris' lies when taking the polygraph test. Chris violates the maxim of quality because he is not honest about what he has done. He also felt nervous when the police pointed at him that he was lying.

Violation of Maxim Quantity

Violations of the maxim of quantity arise when the speaker does not provide enough information or exaggerates information to the hearer regarding the topic being discussed. The following quote shows when Chris exaggerated information to the police about what happened after the murder.

B: "Then what happened to Bella? Tell me what happened there."

A: "She said, "What happened to CeCe?" Every time I close my eyes, I start to see her saying, "Daddy, no," and that was it."

A: "I hear that every day."

This scene occurred when the police asked Chris questions about what happened to Bella. However, Chris added unimportant information about him always hearing Bella's voice every time he closed his eyes. This is considered to violate the maxim of quantity because Chris added unnecessary details when talking to the police.

Violation of Maxim Relevance

When the speaker does not make a contribution that is appropriate to the topic given or when the speaker tries to change the topic of conversation, this is considered to violate the maxim of relevance. In conversations with police, Chris bringing up irrelevant details.

B: "She doesn't ever black out or have seizures or anything?"

A: "She took more Imitrex this last month than she ever had before, but that's because she was in North Carolina with the humidity and everything like that. She was there for six weeks, and we got back... Monday or Tuesday, and then she flew out to Arizona Friday morning."

In this scene, it is shown that during the discussion between the police and Chris, Chris drifts into unrelated topics, such as mentioning Shanann's allergy problems and their return from North Carolina, rather than focusing on his current whereabouts. This shift to unrelated details made him seem evasive and caused investigators to become increasingly suspicious, because it distracted from the main concern of his disappearance.

Violation of Maxim Manner

When a speaker gives an unclear answer, says everything except what he expects to hear, or states something that is not concise and irregular, then the speaker is considered to have violated the maxim of manner. For example, when Chris is avoiding clarity and being evasive.

B: "This might be a tough question, but did... did you guys get into an argument before she left?"

A: "It wasn't like an argument. We had an emotional conversation, but I'll leave it at that, but it's... I just want them back."

In this scene, Chris is considered to have violated the maxim of manner because when discussing his relationship with Shanann, Chris answered unclearly about their last conversation and was reluctant to explain their argument clearly, thus making the hearer unsure of what actually happened.

The Impact of Maxim of Violation on Communication

Based on the opinion of L. Tubbs & Sylvia Moss in (Baharuddin, 2022), communication is said to be effective if people are successful convey what is intended or

communication is considered effective if the stimulus is conveyed and intended by the sender, closely related to the stimulus being perceived and understood by the recipient. Thus, the impact of violating conversational maxims significantly weakens the effectiveness of communication by eroding trust, fostering confusion, and hindering clarity. When someone violates the maxim of quality, by providing false information, trust is immediately compromised, causing others to question the validity of the statement, often ignoring future communications. This distrust complicates understanding and can lead to frustration as the listener attempts to construct an accurate narrative. Violations of the quantity maxim, such as oversharing irrelevant details or withholding important information, will add unnecessary noise to the conversation, distract from important points, and create misunderstandings that further delay resolution. Violating the maxim of Relevance, by shifting focus to an unrelated topic, disrupts the flow of the conversation, making it difficult for listeners to stay engaged or follow key points. Lastly, violations of the maxim of manner present information unclearly or ambiguously, forcing others to spend time interpreting unclear statements, which often leads to further confusion and misinterpretation. Collectively, these violations hinder effective communication by reducing clarity, trustworthiness, and relevance, which are critical to successful and meaningful communication.

CONCLUSION

In this study, four violations of Grice's cooperative maxim occurred. This conclusion was drawn from the results of data analysis obtained during the research. The four violations of the maxims that were fulfilled included 1) maxim of quality 18 times, 2) maxim of quantity 15 times, 3) maxim of relevance 5 times, and 4) maxim of manner 3 times. In addition, it was found that violations of conversational maxims, especially in the documentary *American Murder: The Family Next Door*, had a significant impact on communication effectiveness. Violations of the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and method cause various obstacles in the communication process, such as decreased trust, the emergence of misunderstandings, and disruption of the flow of conversation. These findings indicate that compliance with conversational maxims is very important in maintaining clarity and connectedness in communication, especially in informative communication contexts such as documentaries. For further research, it is recommended

that an analysis of different conversational contexts be carried out to enrich insight into the impact of maxim violations in various communication situations.

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