Flouting of Maxims Done by the Characters in *Avatar: The Way of Water* Movie

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Abstract:

This research analyzes the flouting of maxims expressed by the characters in the film Avatar: The Way of Water. By applying Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Cutting's (2002) theory of flouting of maxims, this analysis aims to identify the types of maxims flouted and to understand the reasons behind these occurrences. A descriptive qualitative approach was applied in this study. For the data, the researcher were taken from the film transcript. Only the characters' utterances that contained flouting of maxims were included. In collecting the data, the researcher watched the film, transcribed the dialogues, and identified utterances in which the maxims were flouted. The data were analyzed by categorizing the flouting of maxims and interpreting the context as well as the reasons behind each instance. The results show that all types of flouting of maxims were found in 31 instances. Flouting the maxim of relevance was the most frequent, as the characters often avoided conflict to maintain harmony in their relationships, which aligns with the film's central theme of family. Other instances of flouting were used to express jokes and sarcasm, while some short or ambiguous utterances implied hidden meanings. In conclusion, flouting of maxims functions as a communication strategy used by speakers to convey specific intentions.

Keywords: pragmatics; cooperative principles; flouting of maxim; Avatar: The way of Water

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menganalisis pelanggaran maksim yang diungkapkan oleh para karakter dalam film Avatar: The Way of Water. Dengan menerapkan Cooperative Principle oleh Grice (1975) dan teori pelanggaran maksim oleh Cutting (2002), penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis maxim yang dilanggar serta memahami alasan di balik kemunculannya. Pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif diterapkan dalam penelitian ini. Peneliti mengambil data dari transkrip film. Hanya ujaran para karakter yang mengandung pelanggaran maksim yang disertakan. Selama proses pengumpulan data, peneliti menonton film, mentranskripsikan dialog, dan mengidentifikasi ujaran yang mengandung pelanggaran maksim. Data kemudian dianalisis dengan mengategorikan jenis pelanggaran maksim serta menafsirkan konteks dan alasan di balik setiap bentuk tuturan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa semua jenis pelanggaran maksim ditemukan dalam 31 data. Pelanggaran maksim relevansi merupakan yang paling sering muncul karena para karakter sering menghindari konflik untuk menjaga keharmonisan dalam hubungan mereka, yang sejalan dengan tema utama film yaitu keluarga. Bentuk pelanggaran maksim lainnya digunakan untuk mengekspresikan humor dan sarkasme, sedangkan beberapa tuturan singkat atau ambigu mengandung makna tersembunyi. Kesimpulannya, pelanggaran maksim berfungsi sebagai strategi komunikasi yang digunakan penutur untuk menyampaikan maksud tertentu.

Kata kunci: pragmatik; prinsip kerja sama; pelanggaran maksim; Avatar: The way of Water

INTRODUCTION

Misunderstandings often arise as challenges in daily interactions. Purba and Ayomi (2022) stated that differences in understanding among interlocutors often lead to misunderstandings in society. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to achieve effective communication in daily interactions. (Marlisa & Hidayat, 2020). The ability of both speakers and listeners to understand the meaning and context behind a message is influential in creating effective communication. Moreover, some rules need to be implemented to help improve communication effectiveness. Grice (1975) introduced the Cooperative Principle, which consists of four principles, namely quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. The Cooperative Principle fulfills the needs in a conversation by guiding the speaker to follow certain rules. Thus, communication runs effectively, and the listener can understand the message clearly.

However, people sometimes choose not to follow these four principles for several reasons. Providing irrelevant answers is intended by the speaker to reveal hidden meanings. As a result, misunderstandings may arise when speakers cannot or choose not to follow certain maxims (Sembiring & Ghozali, 2017). If the speaker flouts the maxim, it means they want the listener to interpret the intended message. For example, irrelevant responses can be used to create humor, irony, or sarcasm. Therefore, flouting shows how complex and flexible human communication can be. When direct communication is considered unsuitable, such flouting can serve as an alternative way for individuals to convey deeper meanings. Additionally, this can occur when the speaker wants to make the conversation sound lighter and more natural.

Research on similar topics has been conducted using the same theory but with different objects and contexts. Gustary and Anggraini (2021) found that all four maxims were flouted in "UP!" Movie. Flouting the maxim of quality occurred most frequently because the characters intentionally provided false information. Meanwhile, the most common strategy was giving excessive information. In addition, "The Analysis of Flouting of Maxims in the Good Morning America (GMA) Talk Show" by Marlisa and Hidayat (2020) analyzed the conversation between Jackie Chan and the hosts. The study found that all types of flouting of maxims occurred, and maxims of manner and quantity being the most frequently flouted. Furthermore, Purba and Ayomi (2022) in "A Pragmatic Analysis of Flouting Maxim Found in Friends Movie", identified 49 instances of flouting maxims found in this movie. These results consist of all types of

flouting maxims, with the maxim of relation being the most frequently found.

Besides the studies on flouting of maxims, research on the Avatar: The Way of Water movie within pragmatic studies has also been conducted by several scholars. Firstly, Aritonang and Ambalegin (2023) analyze expressive speech acts in "Avatar: Way of the Water". There were 46 expressive utterances found, with complaints occurring most frequently at 11 times. Secondly, Hartati et al. (2024) examined types of idioms and highlighted the idiomatic expressions most frequently used by characters in the film. This aimed to reveal that idioms have an impact on audience engagement and character development.

Most studies on flouting of maxims focus on common genres such as comedy or romance. However, few studies analyze flouting of maxims in fantasy films that contain cultural conflicts, specifically in the film *Avatar: The Way of Water*. This film tells the story of the Sully family, who are adapting to a new environment and facing increasing threats from humans (Sky People). Conflict arises when humans search for Jake and destroy the forest where he lives. Seeing this situation, Jake and Neytiri decide to temporarily move to the sea and form an alliance with the Metkayina tribe to protect their children. Based on this storyline, flouting these principles in the film serves as a strategy for the characters to express their emotions in certain situations. Therefore, the researcher is interested in using this film as the object of the study.

This study will answer two research questions: (1) What types of maxim flouting are found in Avatar: The Way of Water? (2) Why do the characters in Avatar: The Way of Water flout these maxims? The theoretical significance of this research is expected to be useful as a reference for further analysis in linguistic studies or in examining flouting of cooperative principles within film contexts. Meanwhile, for practical significance, the researcher hopes that the findings of this study can provide insight into how effective communication can be achieved and help readers understand the meaning behind a person's words.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Context

Context needs to be involved in pragmatic analysis because it helps in interpreting the meaning of a statement. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics basically discusses meaning that arises from context, because the surrounding conditions contribute to

shaping what the speaker wants to convey and how the listener receives it. Van Dijk (2008) suggests that the new theory of context provides a basis for the study of pragmatics, which is the field that examines how language is used and how the social environment influences its use. Similarly, context is considered as a "context model" that speakers use to determine which utterances are appropriate and how their meaning will be understood by the interlocutor.

Cooperative principle

The delivery of messages in the communication process will be optimal if there is cooperation between both parties in the conversation. Grice (1975) asserts that in pragmatic studies, the cooperative principle is a basic concept that explains how speakers and listeners adhere to conversational norms in order to achieve mutual understanding. Furthermore, Brown and Yule (1983, p. 32) emphasized that cooperative principles must be applied appropriately: "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 categorized the cooperative principle into four sub-principles known as maxims, which guide participants in achieving efficient, rational, and cooperative communication (Levinson, 1983). Grice (1975) mentions that the maxims are the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation, and the maxim of manner.

Flouting Maxim

Cutting (2002) explains that flouting of maxims refers to situations in which a speaker appears to disregard the rules of conversation, yet still relies on the listener to understand the implied meaning. Similarly, Grundy (2000, p. 78) defines "flouting maxim as a particularly silent way of getting an addressee to draw an inference and hence recover an implicature." Flouting of maxims may result in uncooperative communication. However, in such cases, speakers deliberately deviate from conversational principles to fulfill communicative goals such as creating humor, expressing irony, or emphasizing a statement.

Flouting the maxim of quality

Flouting the maxim of quality occurs when the speaker lies or deliberately conveys false information, with the aim of making the listener infer the intended meaning (Grice, 1975). Research by Cutting (2002) shows that speakers actually want to convey other meanings, such as irony or sarcasm. For example:

Lisa: "**She's a right pain in the arse sometimes**, me mum. That's why **they don't go anywhere**, you see. Yeah, that's why they don't come up and **visit his brother very often.**"

<div align="right">(Cutting, 2002 p. 70)</div>

Flouting the maxim of quantity

The maxim of quantity is flouted when the speaker provides too much or too little information than what the listener needs. In other words, the speaker avoids getting straight to the point. This is usually done intentionally to emphasize a statement, avoid questions, or end the conversation quickly. For example:

A: "Well, how do I look?"
B: "**Your shoes are nice**…"

<div align="right">(Cutting, 2002, p. 37)</div>

Flouting the maxim of relation

A person is said to flout the maxim of relevance when they intentionally give a statement that does not relate to the topic of the conversation. However, this is done to convey an implied meaning that must be interpreted by the listener. Usually, the speaker's goal is to reject something, avoid conflict, or even change a topic.

For example:

A: "Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days."
B: "**He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately**."

<div align="right">(Grice, 1975, p. 51)</div>

Flouting the maxim of manner

Flouting the maxim of manner refers to people who intenionally convey information in an ambiguous or unclear way. Usually, unfamiliar words or terms that are difficult for the listener to understand are also used. Grundy (2000) explains that this is often used in literary works and films to create tension, so that the audience must interpret the intended meaning. For example:

A: "Where are you off to?"
B: "I was thinking of going out to get some of that **funny white stuff for somebody."**
A: "OK, but don't be long–dinner's nearly ready"

<div align="right">(Cutting, 2002, p. 39)</div>

RESEARCH METHODS

A descriptive qualitative approach was applied as the method in this research. According to Creswell 2009 (p. 2), "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."

Thus, this study investigates how the characters intentionally flout Grice's Cooperative Principle to convey hidden meanings or achieve certain communicative goals. The subjects of this study include all characters in the film, both main and supporting characters. The research data were taken from the transcript of Avatar: The Way of Water, specifically from the characters' dialogues that show flouting of the maxims. There were several steps that must be taken by the researcher to obtain the data: (1) watching the film thoroughly, (2) transcribing the relevant dialogues of all the characters, and (3) identifying the utterances where the maxims were flouted. Once collected, the data were analyzed in the following steps: first, categorizing each utterance based on the specific axim flouted; and second, interpreting the context and the reasons behind each instance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Four types of flouting maxims were found in this film. The table below presents all findings, followed by further descriptive explanations that provide examples for each type.

Table 1. Results of Flouting Maxim

No	Types of Flouting Maxim	Frequency
1	Flouting maxim of quality	7
2	Flouting maxim of quantity	3
3	Flouting maxim of relation	16
4	Flouting maxim of manner	5
	Total	31

Different types of maxim flouting are widespread in the findings of this study. The most common flouting identified by the researcher is the maxim of relevance. There were 16 instances of flouting the maxim of relevance, followed by 7 instances of flouting the maxim of quality, which was the second most common type. Meanwhile, the maxim of quantity was flouted 5 times. Finally, with only 3 cases found, flouting of the maxim of manner was the least common. In total, the researcher found 31 instances of maxim flouting in the data.

Flouting Maxim of Quantity

Data 1

Jake: "So what does Eywa's heartbeat sound like?" Kiri: **"Mighty."**

In the world of Pandora, Eywa was believed to be the god who controlled everything that the Na'vi believed in. Among all the Na'vi people, only Kiri had the ability to connect with Eywa. During their conversation, Kiri told Jake that she could feel

Eywa's heartbeat. Jake then curiously asked what Eywa's heartbeat sounded like. He wanted a detailed answer from Kiri to satisfy his curiosity. However, Kiri only responded with "mighty." Her answer, which contained very little information, fell under the maxim of quantity. Kiri indirectly wanted Jake to understand that Eywa's presence was so mystical and spiritual that it could not even be expressed in words.

Data 2

> Quaritch: "Hey Parker, just what the hell am I supposed to say now?"
> Parker: "Just remind him how this works."
> Parker: "**So see this? This is all your memories and your personality. We're gonna send this back to Earth, where you're growing in a lab as we speak. We're gonna imprint you with it, and then…**"

Quaritch needed to explain some information to his avatar in preparation for hunting Jake Sully. However, he didn't know what to say, so he asked Parker. Instead of providing sufficient information, Parker added more information in his second statement. Quaritch hadn't asked for technical details about memory, laboratories on Earth, and the imprinting process. Therefore, Parker's statement was a flouting maxim of quantity. His statement may explicitly emphasize that the information is important and that all plans have been prepared in detail and in a structured manner.

Flouting Maxim of Quality

Data 3

> Norm: "Hey, Spider." [Norm playfully slaps Spider with a towel]
> Spider: **"Your ass is mine."**
> Norm: "I'm right here.

Spider was walking in front of Norm, but suddenly Norm deliberately teased Spider by slapping him with a towel. Spider then responded by saying, *"Your ass is mine."* In this context, Spider flouted the maxim of quality because his statement did not correspond to reality. He does not literally mean to "own" Norm. The statement uses figurative language that implies Spider will retaliate against Norm. However, Spider's response is not meant seriously, but is merely a joke between friends. The strategy Spider uses is hyperbole. By exaggerating the situation, Spider creates a humorous effect and shows the familiarity of their relationship.

Data 4

> Spider: "Bro, you okay?"
> Loak:"**Yeah. Great, cuz never better.**

Lo'ak was captured by the Sky People, who were hunting his father, Jake Sully. With his hands tied, he was taken to a large ship, where Spider was also located. Seeing

this situation, Spider expressed concern for Lo'ak. However, Lo'ak responded with the words, "Yeah great cuz never better." This response was a flouting maxim of quality, because in fact Lo'ak was clearly not in good condition. He used a strategy of sarcasm/irony, choosing positive words to convey the opposite meaning, so that the implicature that emerged was an expression of frustration with the situation he was experiencing.

Flouting Maxim of Relation

Data 5

Norm: "Spider, take your spare!" Spider: **"I'm just going to the village".**

In the dialogue, Spider enthusiastically exits the human military aircraft after landing on Pandora. Since this moon's atmosphere is very different from Earth's, humans must wear safety equipment such as oxygen supplies. Aware of this danger, Norm instructs Spider to take his backup supply. Instead of responding to Norm's concern, Spider shifts the topic by saying that his destination is the village. This change of topic illustrates flouting the maxim of relation, as Spider's answer, *"I'm just going to the village,"* is irrelevant to Norm's instruction. By implying that the village's proximity makes thebackup unnecessary. Spider strategically rejects Norm's order. His indirect response may be intended to avoid confrontation or offending Norm.

Data 6

Jake: "Kiri, can you go help your grandmother? With the wounded? Please?" Kiri: **"My brother is wounded."**

In this conversation, Jake asked Kiri to help her grandmother care for the wounded after the battle with the Sky People. However, she did not indicate agreement or refusal and instead shifted the focus to her brother's condition. This shows that Kiri flouted the maxim of relation, as her answer was irrelevant to the question. The implied meaning in Kiri's statement was that she wanted to prioritize caring for her brother over following Jake's orders, but she did not express direct refusal in order to avoid conflict.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Data 7

Spider: "Na'vi kids younger than me do this with their bare hands"
Quaritch: "Jake Sully did it the hard way?"
Spider: **"What do you think?"**

Quaritch wants to ride an Ikran, an animal that serves as transportation for the Metkayina tribe in their daily lives. Ikran become wild animals if strangers disturb them. Therefore, Quaritch prepares to shoot it so that it will be easier to ride. Seeing this, Spider

informs him that Na'vi children can do it with their bare hands, and Quaritch becomes curious as to whether Jake can do it that way, too. However, Spider does not give a clear or direct answer to Quaritch's question. Spider should have been able to answer with "Yes" or "No." Instead, he responds with the rhetorical question, "What do you think?" His statement is considered flouting the maxim of manner because it is ambiguous and does not provide explicit information. He implied that the answer was obvious without needing to be said. Na'vi's kids conquered Ikran with their bare hands.

There are many things that can be highlighted after analyzing the findings in this study. First, it becomes apparent that Grice's Cooperative Principle is also applied in a film, specifically in the characters' conversations. As in real life, the meaning of a statement is often conveyed indirectly. Therefore, the phenomenon of flouting maxims in films also shows the complexity of individuals in communicating and understanding each other. Second, every flouting of maxims has a specific purpose. An example is flouting the maxim of quality, which the characters use to express sarcasm or jokes. Therefore, pragmatic theory, especially Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), can help us understand the implied meaning in cinematic works. In addition, this certainly also makes the audience more interested in paying attention to the dialogue in the film.

CONCLUSION(S)

This study found 31 instances of maxim flouting performed by different characters in Avatar: The Way of Water. Among them, flouting the maxim of relation appeared 13 times, flouting the maxim of quantity 3 times, flouting the maxim of quality 10 times, and flouting the maxim of manner 2 times. The high number of relation maxim floutings occurred because the characters often tried to avoid conflict during emotional situations. In connection with the film's family theme, the characters try to protect their relationship by shifting the conversation to other topics, especially in moments that could lead to confrontation. Furthermore, flouting the maxim of quality was frequently used to express jokes or sarcasm. The characters also made statements that are too brief or ambiguous in some conversations, suggesting implied meanings that cannot be conveyed through direct interaction. It can be concluded that in certain situations, flouting the maxim may be acceptable as long as both the speaker and the hearer understand the intended message. In achieving this, considering the surrounding context of the conversation is necessary to avoid misunderstandings.

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