

An Analysis of Flouting Maxims in TV Show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5* based on
Pragmatics Approach

Zelin Feby Zeina Subagyo

Universitas Sebelas Maret

Author Note

Author is a student of English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sebelas
Maret, Jalan Ir. Utami 36A, Surakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to find out the types of flouting maxims employed by the characters in the television show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*, the way the speakers flout the maxims, and to explain the reasons of the characters in the show flout the maxims using pragmatic approach.

This research is a descriptive qualitative research and employs a total sampling technique.

The data analyzed by the researcher are all the dialogues containing flouting maxims uttered by the main characters in the show.

By applying Grice's cooperative principles and his theory of flouting maxims, the researcher found 27 data in total of 22 episodes of the entire season. The result shows that the way the characters flout the maxims varies, but the maxim of quality is flouted the most to create humor.

Keywords: pragmatics, cooperative principles, flouting maxims, Grice, Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5

An Analysis of Flouting Maxims in TV Show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5* based on Pragmatics Approach

Communication is essential for maintaining relationships between every individual. Spoken language, as the most basic way in human communication, is used by people in order to express their feelings, ideas, or simply to exchange some information. These aims could easily be achieved if both the speaker and the hearer cooperate with each other. However, there are times when people say something exactly what they really mean but for many times they tend to say something implicitly or not totally explicit (Thomas, 1995:56).

Herbert Paul Grice, an English philosopher, was the first to systematically study cases in which what a speaker means differs from what the sentence used by the speaker means. In his writings, he tries to explain how it is possible for people to understand indirect utterances that carry implicit meanings. Grice (1975:41-58) has made a theory that tries to explain how the hearer gets from what is said to what is meant. To put it differently, how the hearers shift from the expressed meaning to the implied meaning. He calls this attempt to hint, suggest, or convey some meaning indirectly by means of language as implicature. He divides implicature into conventional implicature and conversational implicature. In conventional implicature, the context of the conversation is not important unlike it is in conversational implicature in which the implied meaning can be seen based on the context of the utterance.

As stated above, both the speaker and the hearer need to cooperate in order to have a functional conversation. It is no different for conversational implicature, both of them should cooperate so that the hearer can interpret the implied meaning from the speaker. Grice in Thomas (1995) has stated that the cooperation between the speaker and the hearer is called the cooperative principles and it contains the rules called maxims.

As it is stated in Thomas (1995:63-64), Grice proposes four maxims of conversation, namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance and maxim of manner which are formulated as follows:

1) Maxim of Quality

- a. Do not say what you believe to be false
- b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

This means that the speaker needs to be truthful and is not allowed to give information that is false and/or without evidence.

2) Maxim of Quantity

- a. Make your contribution as informative as is required
- b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

This means that the speaker has to say just as much as necessary, no more and no less.

3) Maxim of Relevance

- a. Be relevant

In this maxim, the speaker needs to stick to point. They have to make sure that there is a relevancy between what they say and the topic of the conversation.

4) Maxim of Manner

- a. Avoid obscurity of expression
- b. Avoid ambiguity
- c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- d. Be orderly

All in all, this maxim guides the speaker to speak clearly. Unlike grammatical rules, people can choose not to adhere to the maxims (Levinson 1983:103). Grice made a theory that is based on the assumption that it is natural for people to be co-operative in conversations. Maxims are supposedly not only to be used to control the messages but also to control our ability of interpretation (Brumark 2006:1210).

Grice in Thomas (1995:65) has explained that a flout occurs when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim in their utterance to create an implicature. According to him (Thomas, 1995:65-71), flouting maxims are classified into four categories:

1) Flouting the Maxim of Quality

This type of flouting maxim happens when the speaker disobeys the maxim of quality by giving false information or inadequate facts to the hearer, for example:

Amy : Ugh. Gary is killing my productivity. Terry, how did you used to deal with having an Amy?
 Terry : **I didn't have to do anything. You've always been great.**
 Amy : Cut the crap, Terry. I'm drowning.
 Terry : Fine. When you got too difficult to deal with, I'd pull rank.

Amy just gets promoted to a sergeant. She is known as an overachiever both at work and outside of it. She is the type to always eager to please people especially her boss. When she gets promoted to a sergeant and finds out she has to deal with an overachiever subordinate who constantly tortures her, she turns to her former sergeant for advice. In the conversation above, Terry flouts the maxim of quality when he responds to Amy by not telling her the truth but uses sarcasm instead. He tells her that she has always been great while in fact everyone at the precinct including Amy herself knows that is not true. He uses the sarcasm by displaying an expression on his face and speaking with a tone that is the opposite of what he is saying. He does it in hope that Amy catches on that she is indeed difficult to deal with. Being aware that she is being criticized, Amy goes on to ask him for advice.

2) Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

This type of flouting maxim comes up when the speaker disobeys the maxim of quantity by giving the hearer more or less information than that is actually needed by the hearer, for example:

Rosa : So, you painted my apartment?
 Terry : **Walls in *White Wisp*, trim in *Honeymilk*.**

Terry is seen visiting Rosa in prison. When he is asked about painting her apartment as one of the favors she needs him to do while she is in jail, he answers that he painted the walls in *white wisp* and trimmed it in *honeymilk*. Terry flouts the maxim of quantity because he gives her too much information than what she actually needs. To obey the maxim of quantity, he should just answer her with a simple *Yes*. He does not need to tell her about the colors he used to paint her apartment because she does not ask him. He gave the extra information because he wants to emphasize that all of Rosa's business is taken care of so that she does not have to worry about anything while she is in jail.

3) Flouting the Maxim of Relevance

This type of flouting maxim occurs when the speaker gives a response that is obviously irrelevant to the topic either by abruptly changing the topic or obvert failing to address the hearer's goal in asking the question (Thomas,1995:70), for example:

Holt : (*yells*) You let Morris Richman go?!
 Jake : (*pulls out a tampon from his jacket*) **Single tampon?**

In the case above, Holt yells at Jake after he learns that Jake releases a suspect despite having great evidence that the suspect is guilty. Feeling afraid

of Holt getting angry, Jake pulls out a tampon from his jacket and changes the subject by not answering him and offering the tampon instead. The tampon from his jacket is bought by him and Charles while they were doing undercover in a bodega. In the dialogue, the maxim of relevance is flouted by Jake because he changes the subject after he sees that Captain Holt is angry with him. To obey the maxim of relevance, he should have answered Holt whether or not he lets Morris Richman go even after Holt yells at him.

4) Flouting Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner relates not to what is said but rather to how what is said to be said (Grice 1975:46). This type of flouting maxim appears when the speaker speaks vaguely to the hearer so that they are not capable to catch what the speaker means, for example:

- Amy : Come on, Rosa. It'll be so cool. We get to go to SAPO, the Street Activity Permit Office. It is the oldest continuously operating permit office in the state.
- Rosa : Pass. Find somebody else.
- Amy : But we promised to help Captain Holt. Look, it'll be quick. We'll just go, get Murphy his permit, and maybe grab a few shots for the 'Gram. They have the original permits for the 1939 World's Fair.
- Rosa : **No.**
- Amy : Yes!
- Rosa : **No.**
- Amy : (*squeaks*) Yes!
- Rosa : **No, I mean, "No, I don't want to do this."**

In the dialogue, Amy is convincing Rosa to accompany her to the Street Activity Permit Office to help Captain Holt to get Murphy's block party permit. She is so excited because she is obsessed with dealing with documents meanwhile Rosa is not. Thus, she rejects her. When Amy tells Rosa that the office has the original permit for the 1939 World's Fair, Rosa responds with 'No' twice but with an excited tone and excited face as if she could not believe

it. In the end, she states that the ‘no’ means that she does not want to accompany her. With her answering Amy with an excited tone and excited face only to say that she rejects the offer, she flouts the maxim of manner because she is being ambiguous. To obey the maxim of manner, she should have rejected the offer in the first place without making Amy get riled up and then disappoint her. The reason why she flouts the maxim of manner is to make a joke. She is just messing with Amy, because in the end she is aware that she has to accompany her anyway since it is an assignment for both of them.

As it can be seen from the previous examples, context is always needed when we are talking about something. Context does not necessarily mean just as the time and place the speaker states; it also includes the identity of the speaker and the hearer, and the objects that is being discussed. Van Dijk in Levinson (1983:24) has defined context as a complex event that can be divided into two events, the speaker’s utterance as the first event and interpretation about the speaker’s utterance as the second.

Based on the references above, we can emphasize that context does not only talk about what, when, and where an event is happening. Context is complicated for it also talks about the speaker and the hearer and their ideas and statements whether they were written or spoken.

Method

This research is conducted under Pragmatics study. The data are collected from the dialogues uttered by the main characters in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5* which contain flouting maxims. The data are chosen by using total sampling technique. The objects of this research are the types of flouting maxims employed by the main characters in *Brooklyn Nine-*

Nine: Season 5, how the characters flout the maxims, and the reason as to why they flout them.

In order to make the analysis easier, a code was given to each data. The code is based on the order of the datum, the episode the dialogue was in, the initial of the character who flouted the maxims, and the type of flouting maxims employed. The following is the example of coding:

Data 11/E7/H/FQn

The code above means that the datum is the datum number 11 and it is uttered by Holt on episode 7. FQn refers to the type of flouting maxim uttered by Holt that is flouting maxim of quantity.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the types of the flouting maxims flouted by the main characters in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*, how the characters flout the maxims, and the reasons why they flout them.

1. Types of flouting maxims

There are four types of flouting maxims according to Grice (1995), i.e. flouting maxim of quality, flouting maxim of quantity, flouting maxim of relevance, and flouting maxim of manner. All of four types appear in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*. The total data collected from an analysis done to all 22 episodes of the show is 27 data. Each type is analyzed as follows:

Table 1. Types of Flouting Maxims Found in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*

Types of flouting maxim	Total	Percentage
Flouting maxim of quality	14	52%
Flouting maxim of quantity	7	26%
Flouting maxim of relevance	2	7%
Flouting maxim of manner	4	15%
Total	27	100%

As it can be seen from Table 1, there are 27 data found in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*. Flouting maxim of quality is the most dominant with 14 data (52%), followed by flouting maxim of quantity with 7 data (26%), flouting maxim of manner with 4 data (15%), and flouting maxim of relevance with only 2 data (7%).

2. Ways to flout maxims

The main characters in this show flout the maxims in various ways depending on what maxims they flout. Each is analyzed below:

Table 2. Ways to Flout Maxims Found in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*

Types of flouting maxim	Ways to flout maxims
Flouting maxim of quality	irony sarcasm exaggeration
Flouting maxim of quantity	give too much information
Flouting maxim of relevance	change the topic of the conversation
Flouting maxim of manner	slang unnecessary prolixity ambiguous words speak in disorder.

Example of flouting maxim of quality using irony:

- Rosa : It's great. I told them I am bisexual, and they still invited me to game night. They are clearly okay with it.
- Jake : Well, I'm just glad it worked out. Enjoy game night.
- Rosa : Actually, they want you to come to make up for how awkward dinner was.
- Jake : **Oh, fantastic. I'm still involved. Well, I'm sure your dad is a super chill guy to play against.**
- Rosa : He is not.
- Jake : Well, then, let's hope I'm on his team.
- Rosa : That is worse.
- Jake : **Cool. So, no good options. Super stoked about this invite.**

Jake runs over Rosa in work's parking lot after the awkward dinner between them and Rosa's parents the day before. Rosa is actually going to come out to her parents as a bisexual. Jake tags along because Rosa asks him to be an emotional support friend since both of them are longtime friends since school. However, things does not go so well. Her parents assumes in the middle of the dinner that she is dating Jake and expresses their dislike towards him. What makes the dinner more awkward is that they tell her that she is better off dating Jake than being a gay which is their biggest fear. Rosa then storms out of the restaurant after she tells them she is a bisexual.

In the conversation, Rosa is inviting Jake to come to a game night with her parents. Considering how awkward the dinner in the previous night, he has doubts about joining them. However, he knows he could not refuse the offer so he accepts the invitation but with sarcasm. What he says about how fantastic it is that he is still involved and how he is sure that Rosa's dad is super chill is a sarcasm because it is very obvious there is a gap between what he says and what he means. He is not feeling particularly stoked about the invitation even though he says he is. Jake uses sarcasm as a way to flout the maxim of quality in this conversation to express his feeling.

Example of flouting maxims of manner using slang:

- Terry : Oh, also, she's worried about her motorcycle sitting idle, so she wants us to take it out once a day. Here. (*throws the keys to Holt*)
- Holt : I think you should do this. You're more the biker type. I've seen you use a toothpick in public.
- Tery : Motorcycles are death machines. I have three kids. I'm not risking it.
- Holt : Are you saying my life matters less because I don't conform to society's heteronormative, child-centric ideals?
- Terry : Are you really playing the gay card right now?
- Holt : **Yas, queen.** (*throws the keys back to Terry and snaps his fingers.*)

Terry is seen visiting Captain Holt's office to give him the list of favors Rosa needs them to do while she is in prison. One of them is to take her motorcycle out once a day. After being handed the keys, Holt says that Terry should do them instead. Terry refuses by saying that he has three children so he cannot risk riding the death machines. Hearing that, Holt asks Terry if he thinks that his life matters less because he is gay and childless. Stunned by the question, Terry accuses Holt of using the fact that he is gay as a reason to get rid of the favor.

Yas, queen is an urban queer slang that has become mainstream in the recent years as a phrase to express enthusiasm. Holt uses the slang and snaps his fingers to emphasize that he is indeed gay and he uses it to get rid of the favor. He flouts the maxim of manner because he uses a slang to express his feeling. Holt feels happy that he can use the gay card because he knows Terry will not be able to refuse it. To obey the maxim of manner, he must avoid using an obscurity of expression that can make his intention not clear because not everyone can understand the real meaning of the slang. If he were to obey the maxim of manner, he should have just answered with a simple *Yes*.

3. Reasons to flout maxims

The main characters in this show flout the maxims for various reasons. Each is analyzed below:

Table 3. Reasons to Flout Maxims Found in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5*

Types of flouting maxim	Reasons to flout maxims
Flouting maxim of quality	to express their feelings to stress something to make jokes
Flouting maxim of quantity	to give clear information to stress on something, to make jokes
Flouting maxim of relevance	to be polite
Flouting maxim of manner	to avoid unpleasant situation to make jokes

Example of flouting maxim of quality to make jokes:

- Gina : Did you read the email? Are you the commissioner?
 Holt : I don't know. I haven't opened it yet.
 Gina : What?
 Holt : Today is Peralta and Santiago's wedding. I don't want to make it all about me.
 Gina : So you're scared to open it?
 Holt : **Don't be absurd. I simply want everyone to focus on the bride and groom, and not on whether my lifelong dream, which I spent decades working towards, has collapsed in front of my eyes, leaving me untethered in this world and unsure of my very future with the NYPD.**
 Gina : Alright.

Captain Holt is seen training his dog with to be a ring bearer for Jake and Amy's wedding with Gina when he receives an email from the mayor's office telling him if he's the next commissioner of the NYPD. Gina asks him about the result hours later but Holt says he still has not opened the email yet.

Holt answered Gina's question in the conversation by flouting the maxim of quality. He denies the answer at first saying that he just wants everyone to focus on the wedding, and not on his letter which he describes as 'something that will decide whether his lifelong dream, which he has been working for decades, will collapse in

front of his eyes, leaving him untethered in this word and unsure of his future with the NYPD.' Holt could have just answered that he is indeed scared to open the letter, but he flouts the maxim of quality instead by exaggerating his response. He does it because he wants to make a joke to calm himself down. Gina is aware of what he is doing as it can be seen from her nonchalant response.

Example of flouting maxim of quantity to stress on something:

Amy : We just came in here to tell you to save the date, because we're getting married on May 15th. We found a venue!
 Terry : **Wow! Finding a place in the spring in New York is impossible. Sharon and I had to get married in Albany in December. Terry was too cold to consummate.**

At the precinct, Amy and Jake are seen announcing the date of their marriage to their co-workers. They seem so pumped because they get a venue. Terry, their co-worker who is already married, shares his amazement about them getting a wedding venue at the time of the year since he cannot find it for himself when he got married years ago.

Terry flouts the maxim of quantity when he tells Amy about how he was too cold to consummate during his wedding in Albany. To obey the maxim of quantity, Terry just needs to respond to Amy with his amazement about Amy and Jake's getting a wedding venue when it is impossible to do so. There is no need for him to share his experience as private as sex between him and his wife to his co-workers just to stress on how lucky they are. However, Terry is known to be one of the father figures at the precinct, so his sharing and discussing personal experience is not so shocking.

Conclusion

From the data that have been analyzed, the conclusion related to flouting maxims in television show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine: Season 5* is as follows:

From the analysis, the writer found 14 data containing the flouting of the maxim quality, 7 data of flouting maxims of quantity, 2 data of flouting maxims of relevance, and 4 data of flouting maxims in manner.

The main characters in this show flout the maxims in various ways depending on what maxims they flout. In flouting the maxims of quality, the characters use irony, sarcasm, and exaggeration. In flouting the maxims of quantity, the characters give more information that is actually needed. In flouting the maxims of relevance, the characters change the topic of the conversation. In flouting the maxims of manner, the characters use slang, unnecessary prolixity, ambiguous words, and also speak in disorder.

The reasons the characters flout the maxims also varies. The characters flout the maxims of quality to express their feelings, to stress something, or to make jokes. The characters flout the maxims of quantity to give clear information, to stress on something, or to make jokes. The characters flout the maxims of relevance to be polite or to avoid unpleasant situation. The characters flout the maxims of manner mainly to make jokes.

Based on the result of the analysis, the characters in the show flout the maxims of quality the most as it contains 52% of the data. They use it mostly to express their feelings. However, the most occurring reason of why the characters flout the maxims in total is to make jokes.

References

- Brumark, A. (2006). Non-observance of Gricean maxim in the family dinner table conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, 1210.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Cole P, Morgan J. L (ed). *Syntax and Semantics 3*. New York: Academic Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to Pragmatics*. London: Longman.