

THE FLOUTING MAXIMS OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE ON STEVE'S INTERVIEWS TOWARDS BARACK OBAMA

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and thoroughly describe the types of conversational maxim flouting carried out by Barack Obama during political interviews, based on Grice's four Cooperative Principle maxims: Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner. The problem examined is how the utterances of a prominent politician disregard these maxims and what the pragmatic function realized through the resulting implicature is. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the utterance data were collected from two segments of Obama's interviews with Steve Inskeep on the NPR YouTube channel in June and December 2016. The findings identify a total of 17 utterances that flouted maxims, covering the Maxim of Quality (through statements containing uncertainty), the Maxim of Relevance (by shifting the focus of discussion), the Maxim of Quantity (by providing excessive information), and the Maxim of Manner (by using ambiguous or overly wordy language). This maxim flouting is concluded to be a deliberate pragmatic strategy (implicature) in political communication, utilized to control the public narrative, avoid controversy or criticism, and present complex views, which the implied meaning was proven to be well-understood by the interlocutor.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle, Conversational Maxims, Implicature, Political Interview, Pragmatics.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a central aspect of human life, functioning as the primary tool for conveying messages, sharing ideas, and expressing thoughts, both orally and in written form. In every interaction, language is inseparable from the need to express the speaker's intentions, feelings, and purposes. According to Kramsch (2014), language serves as an indicator of social reality, shaping how individuals understand social issues and processes through communication.

As a branch of linguistic science, Pragmatics focuses its study on the use of language in relation to its specific context. Pragmatics examines how the context of communication, communicative goals, and shared assumptions between participants influence the interpretation of an utterance's meaning or linguistic action. This field includes an in-depth study of how speakers and listeners interpret language to achieve effective communication, as well as how non-literal aspects such as implicatures, presuppositions, and Grice's cooperative maxims operate in daily interaction.

In the pursuit of effective communication, H.P. Grice (1975) proposed a principle known as the Cooperative Principle. This principle is founded on the assumption that all

participants in a conversation implicitly agree to make their conversational contributions relevant to the purpose or direction of the exchange currently taking place. This principle is elaborated into four specific guidelines, known as the Conversational Maxims: the Maxim of Quality (be truthful and based on evidence), the Maxim of Quantity (give sufficient information), the Maxim of Relevance (speak relevantly), and the Maxim of Manner (be clear, orderly, and unambiguous). These four maxims represent the ideal standards expected to be followed by every communication participant.

Nevertheless, this Cooperative Principle is often not strictly adhered to. Speakers frequently deliberately "flout" these maxims to convey an implied meaning known as an Implicature. Maxim flouting is an essential communication strategy, enabling the speaker to convey messages that are more complex, subtle, persuasive, or even controversial without stating them explicitly. This intended meaning can be understood by the interlocutor through contextual reasoning, assuming that the speaker still attempts to be cooperative despite the maxim violation.

The Context of Political Discourse is a particularly fertile ground for pragmatic research, especially the phenomenon of maxim flouting. In a political interview, a public figure, such as a President, is often in a position where they must manage their image, avoid sensitive issues, or provide diplomatic answers. Therefore, the flouting of Conversational Maxims in this context can be interpreted as deliberate verbal maneuvers and rhetorical strategies (Implicature strategies). Political figures utilize maxim flouting to control the focus of the discussion, evade direct criticism, or present a more comprehensive narrative.

This research selects the interviews involving Barack Obama on NPR as the main corpus. Obama is known as a highly skilled and strategic communicator. Analyzing his utterances in these political interviews can reveal how the Maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner are tactically utilized or disregarded to achieve specific political communication goals. Based on this background, the study aims to dissect how Obama strategically flouts conversational maxims and the function of the implicature generated within political discourse.

Based on the research background outlined above, the problems to be investigated in this study can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the types of Conversational Maxim flouting (Maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner) identified in Barack Obama's utterances during his political interviews with NPR?
2. What is the pragmatic function (Implicature) contained behind each maxim flouting committed by Barack Obama?

In line with the statement of the problem, this research aims to:

1. Identify and describe in detail the types of Conversational Maxim flouting found in Barack Obama's utterances during the political interviews.
2. Analyze and explain the function of the implicature resulting from the maxim flouting within the context of political discourse.

This study is expected to enrich the academic discourse in the field of Pragmatics, especially concerning the implementation and flouting of Grice's Cooperative Principle within high-intensity, non-formal communication contexts such as political interviews. Theoretically, this research reinforces the understanding of

the role of Implicature as a crucial interpretive bridge between what is said and what is meant.

The results of this research can be used as a reference for political discourse researchers, linguistic students, and communication professionals to understand how language is employed as a strategic and rhetorical tool to manage information, evade questions, and influence public perception in the political arena.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze linguistic phenomena within their actual social context. The qualitative method is chosen because it allows for a systematic, factual, and in-depth description of how Grice's Conversational Maxims are flouted in political discourse and how the resulting implicatures can be interpreted. Creswell (2007) has identified four techniques of qualitative data collection which researchers can adopt. These are field work, observation, interviews (including group interviews and focus groups), and document analysis.

The primary data source for this research is the video recordings and transcripts of two segments of political interviews between Barack Obama and Steve Inskeep uploaded on the NPR YouTube channel: "NPR Interview with President Obama about the Obama years" (uploaded June 2016) and "NPR's Exit Interview with President Barack Obama" (uploaded December 2016). The data specifically focuses on Barack Obama's verbal utterances that are believed to contain flouting of Conversational Maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner) along with the accompanying context and implicature.

In this research process, the main instrument is the researcher itself (human instrument), who acts as the collector, analyzer, and interpreter of the data. The researcher is supported by secondary instruments such as the interview transcripts, data analysis tables, and Grice's Cooperative Principle theory as the conceptual foundation.

The data collection technique employs documentation and listening-and-noting. The stages carried out include repeated viewing observation of the interview videos for deep contextual understanding, transcription of the oral utterances, intensive listening to identify utterances that potentially flout the maxims, and detailed data notation (including the context and the interlocutor, Steve Inskeep).

Subsequently, the data analysis technique follows the qualitative descriptive analysis flow. This process begins with data reduction, where utterances suspected of flouting a maxim are selectively sorted. The reduced data is then presented in tables that include the utterance quotes, discourse context, the type of maxim flouted, and the function of the implicature. The crucial step that follows is interpretation and verification, which involves analyzing the pragmatic function of the resulting implicature. This interpretation is supported by the political context and the interlocutor's response, and is verified against Grice's theoretical framework. The final stage is conclusion drawing regarding the dominant patterns of maxim flouting and their strategic function in political communication.

Findings and Discussion

This chapter discusses two parts, including findings and discussion. The findings section presents data regarding this research problem. The research aims to identify types of flouting maxims between Steve as the host and President Obama as the source in interviews on the NPR YouTube channel. Apart from that, the situation or context is also explained to direct understanding of data analysis. In the second or discussion section, the findings are explained with related theories to understand the phenomenon better.

Findings

This section describes the data obtained by researcher to answer this research problem. Researchers found that Barack Obama as a source had flouting the maxim of cooperative principle. After collecting data the researcher found types flouting maxim of quantity, flouting maxim of quality, flouting maxim of relevance and flouting maxim of manner.

This was adjusted using Grice's 1975 theory of cooperation principles and the theories of other experts who discuss flouting maxim. This study has similarities with the method used in Doorz Interview, which is an interview approach that aims to dig up in-depth information from relevant sources. Similar to Doorz Interview.

This study uses a semi-structured interview technique to gain richer and deeper insights, where the main questions have been prepared in advance, but still provide flexibility for researcher to explore respondents' answers more broadly and an interview approach that combines structured and open-ended questions.

The interviewer uses an interview guide containing key topics or questions, but remains flexible enough to adjust the direction of the interview based on the interviewee's responses. Here, the amount of data used for analysis is presented in table form to make it easy to access the data. The table shows all types of flouting maxim and their frequency in Barack Obama interviews.

This dialog occurred when Steve asked Obama about his views on criticism from an immigrant and new citizen named Jose Luis Voldezda. The criticism highlighted Obama's failure to implement immigration reform despite having a Democratic-controlled Congress at one point.

Tabel 4.1. frequency of data findings in Barack Obama's interview.

No	Flouting maxim	Frequency
1.	Maxim of quantity	3
2.	Maxim of quality	1
3.	Maxim of relevance	7

No	Flouting maxim	Frequency
4.	Maxim of manner	6
	Total	17

The analysis of Obama's utterances across the two interviews, "NPR Interview with President Obama about the Obama years" and "NPR's Exit Interview with President Barack Obama," identified a total of 17 instances of Conversational Maxim flouting across all four categories: Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner. This distribution demonstrates that Obama systematically utilizes these maxims as rhetorical tools to convey specific meanings that differ from the literal content of his speech. The specific case numbers for each maxim are [Specific Case Number for Quality], [Specific Case Number for Quantity], [Specific Case Number for Relevance], and [Specific Case Number for Manner], totaling 17 utterances.

The Maxim of Quantity

Steve : you want to see such a moment you believed there was such a moment for 2008, is there a risk that? Donald Trump could say the same thing 2016 that he could be the man to change the trajectory of the country now.

Obama : well, if he won he could say that.

Obama's answer too brief, that is very minimal answer, not providing an evaluation not providing an evaluation of: Is Trump's claim valid? Is the situation in 2016 the same as in 2008? How does Obama see the direction Trump might go? This answer can be seen as avoiding the substance of the question, which makes it flouting maxim of quantity because it is too brief and not informative enough for a complex context.

The flouting of the Maxim of Quality

Steve : do events of this year suggest that it's getting even worse?

Obama : i am not sure if it is getting even worse, i think that there has been a steady growth in people's cynicism about institution generally and government in particular.

Obama flouted the maxim of quality because, he makes a general statement without evidence in the sentence "there has been a steady growth in people's cynicism" delivered without showing concrete evidence (data, surveys, or specific events). In the context of a serious interview, a flouting maxim of quality. While the maxim of quality requires the speakers not to say something without sufficient evidence.

Flouting Maxim of Relevance

Steve : if some of the cynicism is not justified, are you concerned that voters this year will go to far in overturning things?

Obama : **you know ultimately i have confidence in our voters, you know if you look at American history there have been times where we've taken some though turns primaly fed by fear and disruptions and dislocations.**

Obama did not directly answer the question about concerns, but instead diverted to a more general and historical discussion. Whereas in the framework of the principles of communication cooperation put forward by Grice. The maxim of relevance demands that the speaker's contribution in a conversation must be relevant to the topic or question being discussed.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

Steve : the problem of stagnant wages of course did not start with your presidency yeah, but it has not improved much right why not?

Obama : **well, we have got some long-term trends that we have to battle and when i come into office we were in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the great depression. We have successfully dug ourselves out of that hole.**

Obama's answer in the quote falls into the category of flouting maxim of manner from Grice's cooperative principle because it is not delivered in a clear, direct, and structured manner, and tends to be ambiguous and roundabout. Is flouted through the use of ambiguous, obscure, or overly verbose language and metaphors, generating the implicature that the required answer is inherently complex and cannot be simplified. This strategy often serves to soften controversial statements and prevent his remarks from being interpreted as overly aggressive or confrontational.

In conclusion, the flouting of Conversational Maxims by Barack Obama is a deliberate and successful pragmatic strategy in political communication. The resulting implicatures primarily serve to achieve discourse control (shifting focus away from damaging topics), face-saving mitigation (avoiding explicit admissions of failure), and conveying nuance (highlighting the complexity of issues). Crucially, the interviewer, Steve Inskeep, did not object to these violations, confirming that the communication remained cooperative as he was able to successfully understand the intended implied meaning (implicature).

Discussion

The most dominant flouting in this study is flouting maxim of relevance. This flouting occurs when Obama does not directly respond to specific questions, but instead shifts the focus of the conversation to other topics or broader historical reflections. The reason behind

this flouting is as a pragmatic strategy to control the public narrative. This is because Obama, as a politician, is accustomed to diplomatic answers and narratives to steer the conversation toward safer topics or to emphasize his policies and achievements. Additionally, he avoids controversy or sensitive questions by providing answers that are literally "irrelevant," used to avoid explicit responses to sensitive or controversial questions. For example, when asked about accountability for the public trust crisis, he shifts the answer to the public's positive perception of his personal performance.

Despite the flouting maxims, the interlocutor (Steve Inskeep) proved capable of understanding the implied meaning (implicature) of Obama's utterance. This is evident from Steve's response, which showed no confusion or objection, but rather moved on to the next question, indicating that he successfully grasped the pragmatic purpose behind the flouting maxims.

Conclusion

Based on data analysis, it can be concluded that Barack Obama's utterances in his interview with Steve Inskeep demonstrate a flouting of all four maxims in Grice's Cooperative Principle the Maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner. Flouting these maxims is not an accident, but a deliberate pragmatic strategy (implicature) in political communication. The goal is to control the public narrative, avoid criticism or controversy, and present a complex view of difficult issues. The two most prominent and dominant types of violations are the Maxim of Relevance and the Maxim of Manner, which affirm Obama's communication style that tends to be diplomatic, cautious, and reflective rather than providing straight forward and explicit answers.

Suggestion

For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct similar studies in different social or professional contexts, such as interviewing political figures or other public figures, to compare and generalize the use of maxim violation strategies as pragmatic communication. Further research could also focus on the types of maxim Quality and maxim Quantity to see the extent to which modern politicians utilize uncertainty or information overload/deficiency, not just on the maxim Relevance and Maxims manner. For communication and linguistics practitioners, the results of this study can be used as an educational guide to learn about maxim violations, helping students and the public understand how implied meaning is conveyed thru deviations from conversational norms.

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