

## Instances of Flouting of the Conversational Maxims by Della & Jim in O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*

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**Abstract:** Pragmatics as defined by Kreidler (2009) is a study about people's "ability to derive meaning from specific kinds of speech situation" and also to arrive at 'an interpretation. The cooperative principle lays down norms for people to interact with one another. Mutual cooperation is a necessity among speakers. Building upon Gricean Maxims(1975) Fasold and Connor (2006) and Paltridge (2006) argue that the maxims rely on the addressee's assumption in making a sense of what the speakers say. The assumption which is made by the addressee/s should be rational and cooperative to create the effective communication. Usually people do not obey the maxims. They tend to violate, flout, infringe or opt out the maxims. This research focuses on the flouting of maxims by the main characters Jim and Della in O.Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*. This study uses descriptive Qualitative Method to find out the number of utterances the number of floutings and it tries to decipher the strategies and reasons behind the floutings. The study identified that 96.87% of utterances are flouted. It also found that all the maxims are flouted. All the characters in the short story flouted the maxims.

**Keywords:** Cooperative Principle, flouting O.Henry *The Gift of the Magi*

### 1. Introduction

The Co-operative Principle is a collection of Paul Grice's four conversational maxims which enables effective and cooperative conversation to happen.

#### 1.1 Maxims and Examples

The Maxim of Relation requires the speaker to utter what is relevant to the topic at discussion.

In Levinson ,Brown(1978) and Yule's model (1985) , using when instead of Wh-word "why "to know the reason behind the question of knowing the date is failing in choosing the correct question word. Thus there is flouting of the relevance maxim.

A: "What's the date?"

B: Why do you want to know that?

The Maxim of Quality requires the speaker to provide only the truth. Not to say anything for which one doesn't have any evidence.

According to Brown and Levinson 's model asking rhetorical questions is also flouting the maxim of quality.

A: When is your engagement?

B: What is the use of telling you that?

Are you going to attend it?

A. I want a set of Dosa.

B. Shetty, No dosa for you.

His name is Gulab, but the cashier at the restaurant denies him to serve him his meal. Further he insults him calling him Shetty. Ironically addressing one with Father's, grandfather's or family name is also common. Misuse of appropriate concept in the conversation is clear flouting of the maxim of quality.

A:Give me a kiss. To the cream of your milk, Dear.

According to Brown and Levison 's models, she flouts the maxim of quality, since the speaker metaphorically compares herself with the cream in the milk. Using a metaphor results in flouting the maxim of quality.

The Maxim of Quantity requires the speaker to give as much amount of information as required; not more and not less.

" Asha, don't make it difficult for yourself, I will find my own way out "

The speaker violates the maxim of quality though she requests Asha not to accompany her, its ironic and thus not adhering to Maxim of Quality according to Brown and Levinson's model.(1978)

A: I want coffee. I want coffee.

In the above dialogue , the speaker repeats the same sentence which is supposed to be understood by the receiver at the first utterance. This tautology makes the speaker flout the maxim of quantity according to Grice 's principle " one should give the appropriate amount of information –not too much or too little.

The Maxim of Manner requires the speaker to avoid being ambiguous or obscure in speaking.

Mother: How did you finish the food in your plate?

Child: What's now?

Mother: What's now? How did you do it?

The child's reply is an ambiguous question. This makes her flout the maxim of manner, also flouts the maxim of quantity since she gives a little/no information. Then the mother who is supposed to answer the question, instead, asks another question. The failing of addressing the topic of the conversation makes the mother also flout the maxim of manner.

The above said maxims are broken in two ways:

- a. Flouting is overtly breaking maxims.
- b. Violating is covertly breaking a maxims.

### 1.2 Implicatures

Conversational Implicature is devised by Paul Grice in 1975. It differentiates between what the speaker says and what he/she actually means in a conversation. Grice developed four "maxims" of conversation for the success of a communication.

Culpeper.J and Schauer.G (2009) define Implicature as "the implied meaning generated intentionally by the speaker. These meanings are usually made covertly. Politeness strategies are used.

Example:

Prabha: Do you want to go with me to the Wedding?

Usha: I'm washing my hair.

In this example, it seems as though Usha isn't actually answering the question. She certainly doesn't actually say whether or not she will go to the Wedding with Prabha. The implicature of her response is that she isn't going. She has conveyed her meaning, intentionally, without explicitly stating it so as to be polite.

#### 1.2.1 Implicatures of Quality Maxim

When metaphors are used it gets deviated from truth and reality. But the implicatures are there to interpret the meanings.

Example

A: Do you like Suman?

B: She's the apple of my eye.

Though it looks as if B breaks the maxim by not answering A, for any speaker of English it's obvious B has answered and there's no lie hidden.

#### 1.2.2 Implicatures from the quantity maxim

An implicature of the quantity maxim is illustrated below:

A: "Are you a Literature student?"

B: "No" (silence) +> 'Not interested to converse with you any further'

An unadorned "No" isn't always rude. The "No" put into different contexts may yield different implicatures. For example in a small college where only two majors are offered the "no" to one major implies the other.

#### 1.2.3 Implicatures from manner

The following example illustrates a distinction between direct causation (a) and indirect causation (b).

a. Sunitha asked Parameshwaran to sing.

b. Sunitha made Parameshwaran sing a song. +> 'She didn't ask him in an usual way'

Perhaps, she forced, threatened, requested, hit Parameshwaran to sing.

Brevity is a goal in Grice's maxim of manner. The indirect causative (b) is longer than the direct causative (a). Both sentences entail that Parameshwaran sang. In Levinson's (2000: 136) view: 'What is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation'

A. Prem switched the Micro oven off.

B. Prem caused the Microoven go off.

B implies Prem's action was not normal and the Micro-oven would have to stop suddenly or it broke.

#### 1.2.4 Implicatures from relevance

Contributions of the interlocutors should be relevant to the current goals of the discourse according to Grice's relevance maxim.

(1.4). A: "What's the date?"

B: 20th August, 2020 (while filling in a form.)

B: 20 (the student helping the teacher to write the date on the board)

B: I don't know. (When enquiring about future or past events) Forgetful/innocence/ignorance

B: I don't know. (A lie)

B: I don't know. (Arrogance, scared, etc)

B: Late 20th C (Banter)

B. I like to eat out. [adjacency pair (request- answer) isn't adhered]

Research Questions

Based on the background of the study this research formulated the following Research Questions.

1. What are the maxims flouted by the main Characters?
2. Who flouted more?
3. Which was the most flouted maxim?
4. Which was the least flouted maxim?
5. What are the reasons and /or implicatures for the flouting?

**2. Literature Review**

Khosravizadeh, P., & Sadehvandi, N. (2011) analyzed the violation or flouting of the maxim of quantity, in the movie “Dinner for Schmucks. They also found if any one opted out of the conversation. The study traced that in five occasions the two main characters studied, violated the maxim of quantity.

A qualitative content analysis study done by Ayasreh, A. M., Al-Sabti, N., Suleiman Awwad, A., Mansoor, M., & Razali, R. (2019) reasons out the Arab leader Gaddafi’s violation of all the four maxims in his Arab Spring Address. How the Syrian leader, Bashar Al-Assad flouts some of the conversational maxims during his interview with the ARD channel was studied by Amer Ayasreh, & Razlina Razali. (2018). These two studies reveal the fact the leaders flout the maxims so as to interpret things favorable to him to gain the support from masses. A. M. Alduais (2012) documented a conversation with one of his friends and analyzed the evidence using both Austin's and Grice's Pragmatics concepts. The argument that our discourse can be systematized and has implicatures in one context but not in another was reinforced by pragmatic analysis of instances of flouting the four maxims of speech.

This present study is unique as it focuses on the floutings of the utterances in the main characters of the world famous short story written by the renowned writer O.H enry.

**3. Research Design**

The Researcher used Descriptive Quality Design. Qualitative research is conducted to comprehend the context from which the problem is extracted.( Cresswell 1992)

The data was the utterances of Jim and Della, the main characters of O.Henry’s The Gift of the Magi which was originally published on 10th Dec, 1905 in The New York Sunday World as "Gifts of the Magi" and which was in 1906 subsequently published as The Gift of the Magi in The Four Million, O. Henry's 1906 short story collection.

Data collection was done after reading the short story several times. Then the conversations were extracted from the story. Then the data was listed, the floutings were marked in the columns. Totaling and finding percentages of the floutings were done to answer Research luestions 1 to 4. The data was interpreted after tables and graphs were drawn. Finally for the presentation and interpretation of the results of Research Question Five, the data was put in the same array as in the story and analyzed. Conclusions were drawn.

**Results & Discussions**

**R Q.1**

All the four maxims are flouted. The study identified that 96.87% of utterances are flouted. It also found that all the maxims are flouted. All the characters in the short story flouted the maxims.

Data	Speaker	Maxim of Quantity	Maxim of Quality	Maxim of Relevance	Maxim of Manner	Total
1	Della					
2	Madame	1				
3	Madame					
4	Della			1	1	2
5	Della	1			1	2
6	Jim	1		1	1	
7	Della	1		1	1	3
8	Jim	1		1	1	
9	Della	1	1	1	1	4
10	Jim	1	1	1	1	
11	Della	1			1	2
12	Della	1				
13	Della	1	1	1	1	4
14	Jim	1		1	1	
<b>Total</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>%</b>		<b>34.37</b>	<b>9.37</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>31.25</b>	

Tab.1 Speaker - wise Floutings of Maxims.

R.Q 2 Della flouted the most. Out of 32 floutings in the 14 utterances identified 17 are flouted by Della, 14 by Jim and one by Madame.

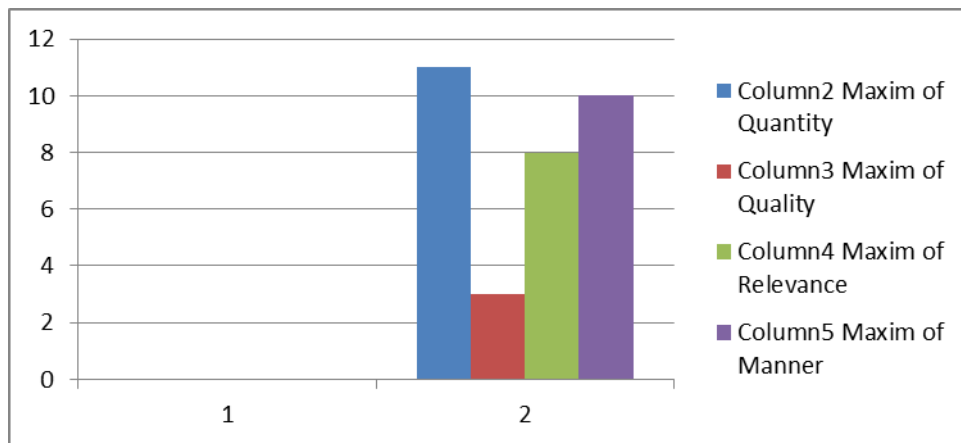


Fig.1 Numbers of Maxims Flouted

R.Q. 3 The maxim flouted the most was the maxim of Quantity.

R. Q.4 The maxim flouted the least was the maxim of Quantity

Speaker	Maxim of Quantity %	Maxim of Quality %	Maxim of Relevance %	Maxim of Manner %	Total %
Jim	36.36	33.33	50	40	39.9
Della	54.54	66.66	50	60	57.8

Tab.2 Distribuion of Percentage of Maxims

The above percentage table clearly indicates that Della flouted every maxim more than Jim.

Data 1

Della:Will you buy my hair?

No flouting. All the four maxims are followed.

Data 2

Madame: I buy hair, Take your hat off and let us have a look at it.

Maxim of Quantity is flouted. The implicature is Madame would buy hair only if she is satisfied.

Data 3

Madame: Twenty dollars

Madame's utterance seems like too little information. But it doesn't float any maxims.

Conversational Implicature as well as Scalar implicature Twenty Dollars is the offer she gives to Della.

Data 4

Della: Give it to me quick

Della flouts the maxim of manner. Though it looks Della is flouting the Maxim of Relevance and her utterance is in line with Madame's offer of Twenty Dollars.

She agrees to Madame's offer and there's no time to stand and bargain. She implies that she wants the money quickly.

Conversational Implicature.

Data 5

Della : Jim, darling, don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again--you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice-what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

Della flouts the maxim of quantity and Manner in this utterance by talking too much and not giving a turn to Jim to answer question, to reply the greeting.

Data 6 and Data 8

Jim : You have cut off your hair?"

Jim : You say your hair is gone?"

Although Jim could see Della standing before him like Coney Island Chorus girl and she keeps telling him that she sold her hair to buy a gift for him Jim keeps on repeating the question whether she has cut her hair. He further doesn't respond to any of her questions on her new looks. He doesn't show any curiosity on the gift she bought for him. He doesn't wish her back, "Merry Christmas." Jim flouts the maxims of quantity, relevance and manner with such ambiguous, obscure and irrelevant utterances.

The implicature is crystal clear. He intends Della to understand that she has given him a big shock.

Data 7

Della: Cut it off and sold it, Do you not like me just as well? I am the same person without my hair, right?

Della repeats Jim's words. To both it's obvious that the hair is cut. But they keep repeating since it's one of their two valuable things. Maxim of Quantity, relevance and manner are flouted.

Data 9

Della: You need not look for it, It is sold, I tell you--sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

In spite of Jim not uttering any word of abuse or words of discomfort, In spite of his not getting angry or furious Della is giving reasons after reasons for her selling the hair. She flouts the maxim of Quantity. By using the figurative, pompous language she flouts the quality maxim. She repeats what she has already told that she has sold off her hair. She flouts manner maxim. Della changes the topic by mentioning about food- She flouts maxim of Relevance.

The implicatures are many. Della is upset. Della thinks she doesn't looks as pretty as before. She's worried that Jim won't like her present looks. She wants him to understand that she's ready to sacrifice anything for his sake, inclusive of her beautiful looks.

There's another implicature that Della has to flout the maxim of quantity by talking too much, since Jim's shock has pushes her to a position of convincing him rather than consoling herself for the loss of her hair.

Data 10

Jim: Don't make any mistake, Dell, about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll un wrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

Instead of a simple, "It's all right Dear" Jim goes on justifying his reaction to her haircut. He flouted the maxim of relevance by not answering her last question because he was justifying his reaction of queer look. Jim doesn't respond either to Della's question whether she can get the dinner ready for him or to her expressions of expressing his love for him. He's not enquiring about what she present she bought and for how much she sold her hair for. He isn't telling her how and why of his shock and keeps the secrecy of the gift by letting her open the gift. He flouts all the maxims.

The implicatures are he knows that Della's enquiry about dinner is not that serious. He still wants to spring a surprise on her.

Data 11

Della: My hair grows so fast, Jim!

Della doesn't respond to Jim's explanation, expressing his true love. Instead she started unpacking the gift and on unwrapping the package, she didn't comment on the gift. Della flouts the maxims of quantity and manner here.

Data 12

Della: Oh, oh!

She expresses her emotions by uttering 'oh' twice. Maxim of Quantity is flouted with the strategy "Tautology".

Data 13&14

Della: Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.

Jim: Della let us put our Christmas gifts away and keep them a while. They are too nice to use just right now. I sold my gold watch to get the money to buy the set of combs for your hair. And now, why not put the meat on.

Della asked him a question. Without waiting for him to reply, she started to narrate her efforts, interest and love to get him a good watch. Here, she flouts the quantity maxim. She doesn't wait for him to give her the watch. She flouts the Maxim of manner also by her eagerness to see how it matches his watch. By using a hyperbole 'a hundred times a day' she flouts the quality maxim.

She, though unhappy on losing her hair and went crazy on seeing Jim's presents for her-a pair of combs, the possession of which was her dream and which she can't use now, like a mother to her babe, tries to change the topic and make him feel happy. Thus she flouts the maxim of Relevance.

The implicature is that she doesn't want Jim to feel sorry for her cutting and selling her beautiful hair. Jim hasn't replied to her question with a compliment and thus opts out answering Della.

The implicature for his opting out is the fob chain she bought for him by selling her locks is of no value to him, since he has already sold the watch. There is also another implicature that he doesn't want Della to cry over spilt milk.

Jim during his turn taking changes the topic as an attempt to divert her attention to normal life and thereby flouts the maxim of relevance too. Jim didn't tell Della that he has sold his watch. He's talking about using them later. According to him the gifts are too good to use them immediately. After a preamble, he reveals the fact that her sacrifice of losing her golden locks have gone waste, since he has already sold his precious watch. So, he flouted Maxim of quantity and Manner.

Since the two main characters of the short story *The Gift of Magi* are true and it's a day in their usual mundane poverty-stricken life, we don't find any guiles, banter, sarcasm, irony, metaphor or hyperboles. That's why the maxim of Quality is the least flouted one.

#### 4. Conclusion:

Based on the data analysis, in studying the utterances of Della and Jim by focusing on the Grice's maxim violation, it can be seen that the number of flouting of maxims is 32 turns (100%). The flouting of maxim quality is 3 times (9,37%), flouting of maxim quantity is 11 times (34.37%), flouting of maxim relation is 8 times (25%), and flouting of maxim manner is 10 times (31.25%). As the *Gift of the Magi* is about love and sacrifice there wasn't any need for the characters to indulge in Banter, sarcasm.

The present study concludes that flouting of maxims happen even in a tragic love story. There can be multiple floutings in a single utterance. Flouting doesn't mean cheating, unnecessary talks. It's an expression of love, outburst of true emotions. People flout by changing the topic, talking too much or too less and don't adhere to adjacency pair and indulge in Tautology not because they are cheaters but they are true to their selves. Flouting happens everywhere even in ordinary everyday conversations. If the addressees lend their ears to the speakers, they might get a deeper understanding of the speakers' intention. O Henry brings the true love story emphasizing on love and sacrifice for one another's sake. The classic story is abound with emotional outbursts that entertain as well as enlighten us.

#### 5. Recommendations:

Floutings of Maxims by eminent Speakers, Political Leaders would shed more light on their characters and verbal power.

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