

GRICEAN MAXIM NON-OBSERVANCE IN *THOR: RAGNAROK* (2017): FLOUTING, VIOLATION, IMPLICATURE, AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

Conversational interactions in films often convey non-literal meanings through the non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle. This descriptive qualitative study investigates Gricean maxim non-observance in *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), focusing on flouting, violation, conversational implicatures, and their communicative functions. Data gathered from dialogue transcripts through observation and note-taking yielded 47 instances of maxim non-observance. Maxim flouting emerged as the predominant form with 37 cases, encompassing relation (14), quality (12), quantity (7), and manner (4). In contrast, 10 instances of maxim violation were identified, all exclusively restricted to the maxim of quality. The findings demonstrate that maxim non-observance serves as an intentional pragmatic strategy rather than a communication failure. Flouting is primarily employed to generate humor, irony, sarcasm, and implied meanings, whereas violation operates covertly to conceal information, manipulate interlocutors, and protect personal interests. Ultimately, the strategic interplay between flouting and violation plays a vital role in enhancing characterization, conveying implicit meanings, and advancing cinematic narrative development.

Keywords: *communicative functions; flouting; Gricean Cooperative Principle; implicature; maxim non-observance; pragmatics; violation*

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Introduction

Language plays a fundamental role in human life as the primary means of communication and social interaction. Through language, individuals exchange ideas, share knowledge, and construct social and cultural identities within a community. From a social perspective, language functions not only as a medium for conveying messages but also as a form of social action through which speakers collaboratively construct meaning during interaction (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023). Consequently, communication serves as a bridge that facilitates interpersonal relationships, particularly in situations involving diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

In everyday communication, however, meanings are not always conveyed explicitly. Speakers frequently produce utterances containing implied meanings that require contextual interpretation. This phenomenon demonstrates that meaning is shaped not only by linguistic structure but also by the context in which language

is used. Therefore, understanding utterances cannot be separated from pragmatics, a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between language and context in meaning-making (Novera et al., 2021).

One of the most influential theories in pragmatics is Grice's Cooperative Principle, which proposes that effective communication is guided by four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. These maxims encourage speakers to provide sufficient, truthful, relevant, and clear information to facilitate successful communication (Novera et al., 2021). Nevertheless, natural conversations do not always adhere to these principles. Speakers may intentionally depart from the maxims through forms of maxim non-observance, particularly flouting and violation. Such departures should not necessarily be regarded as communication failures; rather, they often function as deliberate pragmatic strategies for conveying implied meanings that listeners are expected to infer from the conversational context (Novera et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of maxim non-observance is frequently observed in audiovisual media, particularly films and television series. Film dialogues represent complex social interactions in which characters often employ indirect language, irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, and humor to achieve specific communicative purposes. In this context, maxim non-observance contributes not only to the creation of conversational implicatures but also to characterization, narrative development, and audience engagement (Novera et al., 2021).

Among contemporary films, *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) provides a particularly relevant context for examining Gricean maxim non-observance. As part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the film is characterized by dynamic interactions among its characters, combining humor, conflict, and emotionally charged exchanges. The characters frequently employ utterances whose intended meanings extend beyond their literal interpretations, making the film an appropriate source for pragmatic analysis.

Previous studies have demonstrated that maxim non-observance is a common phenomenon in audiovisual discourse. Gledin and Sembodo (2021) investigated violations of conversational maxims in the television series *You* and found that maxim violations function as manipulative strategies for concealing information, influencing interlocutors, and constructing psychologically complex characters. Meanwhile, Novera et al. (2021) examined maxim flouting in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* TV series and reported that all four conversational maxims could be flouted to generate conversational implicatures, create humor, and enrich character interactions. Although these studies provide valuable insights, they primarily focus on a single form of maxim non-observance. Consequently, the relationship between flouting and violation, together with their conversational implicatures and communicative functions, remains insufficiently explored.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates Gricean maxim non-observance in the dialogues of *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) by examining both flouting and violation based on Grice's Cooperative Principle (as cited in Gallai, 2023). Specifically, this study identifies the forms of maxim non-observance, classifies the conversational maxims involved, and analyzes the conversational implicatures and communicative functions generated in the interactions among the film's characters. By integrating these aspects within a single analysis, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of maxim non-observance as an intentional pragmatic strategy in film dialogue while contributing to the development of pragmatic studies in audiovisual discourse.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate Gricean maxim non-observance in the dialogues of *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017). A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to interpret utterances within their natural conversational contexts rather than quantify linguistic phenomena. As suggested by Creswell (2022), qualitative research emphasizes understanding and interpreting meanings derived from words, utterances, and texts within their contextual settings.

The primary data consisted of dialogue transcripts from *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), while the audiovisual content of the film was used to support contextual interpretation during the analysis. The film was accessed through the Disney+ streaming platform, and the dialogue transcripts were obtained from Script Slug. Data were collected using observation and note-taking techniques. The researcher repeatedly watched the film, examined the dialogue transcripts, identified utterances containing maxim non-observance, and classified them according to the forms of non-observance investigated in this study, namely flouting and violation, as well as the conversational maxims involved quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

The data were analyzed by applying Grice's Cooperative Principle as the primary analytical framework. Each selected utterance was examined to determine the form of maxim non-observance, identify the conversational maxim involved, interpret the conversational implicature, and explain its communicative function within the conversational context. Finally, the findings were presented descriptively to illustrate how maxim non-observance contributes to meaning construction and character interaction in the film.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of Gricean maxim non-observance identified in the dialogues of *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017). The findings are classified according to the forms of maxim non-observance and the conversational maxims involved. To provide a focused discussion, one representative example from each category is analyzed in detail to explain the conversational implicature and communicative function generated by the characters' utterances. The overall distribution of the findings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Gricean Maxim Non-Observance in Thor: Ragnarok (2017)

Form of Maxim Non-Observance	Conversational Maxim	Frequency
Flouting of Maxim	Maxim of Quantity	7
	Maxim of Quality	12
	Maxim of Relation	14
	Maxim of Manner	4
Violation of Maxim	Maxim of Quantity	-
	Maxim of Quality	10
	Maxim of Relation	-
	Maxim of Manner	-
Total		47

As shown in Table 1, this study identified a total of 47 instances of Gricean maxim non-observance in the dialogues of *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017). Of these, 37 instances were categorized as maxim flouting, whereas the remaining 10 instances were classified as maxim violation. Among the flouting categories, the maxim of

relation occurred most frequently (14 instances), followed by the maxim of quality (12 instances), the maxim of quantity (7 instances), and the maxim of manner (4 instances). In contrast, all instances of maxim violation involved the maxim of quality. These findings indicate that both flouting and violation are employed by the film's characters as pragmatic strategies to convey meanings beyond the literal interpretation of their utterances. The following sections discuss representative examples from each category to illustrate how these forms of maxim non-observance generate conversational implicatures and fulfill specific communicative functions in the film.

1. Flouting of Conversational Maxim

Non-observance of conversational maxims in the dialogue of the film *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) is predominantly characterized by the flouting of maxims. Flouting occurs when a speaker deliberately and blatantly fails to observe the cooperative principle with the expectation that the interlocutor will infer the implicit meaning or conversational implicature (Oksinia et al., 2021; Tamrin et al., 2022). This phenomenon aligns with Grice's framework (as cited in Novera et al., 2021), which posits that maxim flouting serves as a pragmatic strategy for conveying indirect utterances.

In the interaction among characters in this film, flouting was identified across all four maxim categories. Speakers flout the maxim of quantity by providing information that is either excessive or insufficient relative to what is required (Krause & Vossen, 2024; Miehlting et al., 2024) to express enthusiasm or convey specific emphasis. Meanwhile, the flouting of the maxim of quality is realized through literally untrue statements, such as the use of irony, sarcasm, or hyperbole (Krause & Vossen, 2024; Miehlting et al., 2024) to deliver criticism or mockery. Regarding the flouting of the maxim of relevance, characters intentionally provide responses that lack direct connection to the topic at hand (Krause & Vossen, 2024; Miehlting et al., 2024) in order to divert the conversation or communicate implicit messages. Lastly, the flouting of the maxim of manner is performed by constructing ambiguous, obscure, or unstructured utterances (Krause & Vossen, 2024; Miehlting et al., 2024). These findings accentuate that overt maxim non-observance in film dialogue does not constitute a communicative failure, rather, it operates as an effective pragmatic strategy instrument to fulfill specific communicative functions, such as generating humor and irony while intensifying conflict dynamics and characterization.

1.1 Flouting of the Maxim of Quantity

Among the 37 instances of maxim flouting identified in this study, seven were categorized as flouting of the maxim of quantity. This type of flouting occurs when a speaker intentionally provides either more or less information than is required by the conversational context, prompting the hearer to infer the intended meaning through conversational implicature (Novera *et al.*, 2021).

Context: This interaction takes place at the Sanctum Sanctorum in New York, where Thor visits Doctor Strange to seek information about Odin's whereabouts. As a gesture of hospitality, Doctor Strange offers Thor a drink and asks what he would like to have. Rather than naming a specific beverage, Thor responds only by rejecting one option.

Dr. Strange: “*What do you drink?*”

Thor: “*Not tea.*”

0:16:39 – 0:16:41

Thor's response, *"Not tea,"* is classified as flouting the maxim of quantity because it intentionally provides less information than Doctor Strange expects. Instead of stating his preferred drink, Thor merely rejects one option, requiring Doctor Strange to infer his actual preference from the context. This utterance generates the implicature that Thor prefers a stronger beverage, which is confirmed when Doctor Strange subsequently serves him beer. Rather than causing a communication failure, the flouting functions as an indirect rejection of the offered drink while emphasizing Thor's personality as an Asgardian warrior. It also contributes to the humorous interaction between the two characters, demonstrating how flouting the maxim of quantity conveys implicit meaning and supports characterization in the film.

1.2 Flouting of the Maxim of Quality

Among the 37 instances of maxim flouting identified in this study, 12 were categorized as flouting of the maxim of quality. This type of flouting occurs when a speaker intentionally says something that is obviously untrue or exaggerated, prompting the hearer to infer the intended meaning rather than interpret the utterance literally (Novera *et al.*, 2021).

Context: This conversation takes place when Thor is captured by Surtur in Muspelheim. Surtur warns Thor that Ragnarok has already begun and predicts the destruction of Asgard. Instead of responding seriously to the threat, Thor replies with an ironic remark before expressing his determination to stop Surtur's plan.

Surtur: *"But Ragnarok has already begun. You cannot stop it. I am Asgard's doom, and so are you. All will suffer, all will burn."*

Thor: *"That's intense. To be honest, seeing you grow really big and set fire to a planet would be quite the spectacle. But it looks like I'm going to have to go with option B where I bust out of these chains, knock that tiara off your head, and stash it away in Asgard's vault."*

0:03:43 – 0:04:19

Thor's response is classified as flouting the maxim of quality because he intentionally makes an ironic statement that is not meant to be interpreted literally. His remark about enjoying the spectacle of Surtur destroying a planet is clearly an exaggeration used to mock Surtur's threat rather than express genuine admiration. This utterance generates the implicature that Thor remains confident and unafraid despite the danger. Pragmatically, the flouting functions to ridicule Surtur, reduce the seriousness of the situation, and reinforce Thor's courageous and humorous personality. Thus, the utterance demonstrates how flouting the maxim of quality conveys implicit meaning while contributing to characterization and the film's comedic tone.

This finding supports the overall result of the study that flouting the maxim of quality is frequently employed to express irony and humor while conveying meanings beyond the literal interpretation of the utterance.

1.3 Flouting of the Maxim of Relation

Among the 37 instances of maxim flouting identified in this study, 14 were categorized as flouting of the maxim of relation, making it the most frequently occurring type. This form of flouting occurs when a speaker intentionally gives a response that is irrelevant to the ongoing topic, encouraging the hearer to infer the intended meaning through conversational implicature (Novera *et al.*, 2021).

Context: This conversation takes place in an alley on the planet Sakaar after Valkyrie rescues Thor and Banner from an alien attack. Valkyrie questions the cloth covering Thor's head, which Thor claims is his disguise.

After Valkyrie points out that his face is still clearly visible, Thor abruptly changes the subject instead of defending his explanation.

Valkyrie: *“What’s with the...”*

Thor: *“It’s my disguise.”*

Valkyrie: *“But I can see your face.”*

Thor: *(Covers his face) “Not when I do this, you can’t. Your hair looks nice. I like what you did with it. Change it? Washed it maybe?”*

1:23:34 – 1:23:43

Thor's utterance is classified as flouting the maxim of relation because he intentionally shifts the conversation to an unrelated topic instead of responding to Valkyrie's observation. Rather than continuing the discussion about his ineffective disguise, Thor suddenly compliments Valkyrie's hair and asks about her hairstyle. This abrupt topic change generates the implicature that Thor recognizes the weakness of his own excuse and chooses to avoid further embarrassment. Pragmatically, the flouting functions to divert Valkyrie's attention, prevent the conversation from continuing, and preserve Thor's self-image. This finding demonstrates how flouting the maxim of relation conveys implicit meaning through deliberate topic shifting while supporting characterization and the humorous interaction between the characters.

1.4 Flouting of the Maxim of Manner

Among the 37 instances of maxim flouting identified in this study, four were categorized as flouting of the maxim of manner. This type of flouting occurs when a speaker intentionally exploits ambiguity or obscurity, prompting the hearer to infer the intended meaning beyond the literal interpretation of the utterance (Novera *et al.*, 2021).

Context: This conversation takes place at the Grandmaster's detention facility on Sakaar after Valkyrie delivers Thor to receive her reward. Feeling betrayed and restrained, Thor angrily threatens Valkyrie by warning that she will face the consequences of her actions. Instead of responding to the threat directly, Valkyrie deliberately interprets Thor's words in a different sense.

Thor: *“You’ll pay for this!”*

Scrapper 142: *“No, I got paid for this.”*

(Valkyrie)

0:37:57 – 0:38:01

Valkyrie's response is classified as flouting the maxim of manner because she deliberately exploits the ambiguity of the word *pay*. While Thor uses the expression *“You’ll pay for this”* as an idiomatic threat, Valkyrie intentionally interprets *pay* in its literal financial sense by replying, *“No, I got paid for this.”* This ambiguity generates the implicature that she is neither intimidated by Thor's threat nor willing to take it seriously. Pragmatically, the flouting functions to mock Thor, display Valkyrie's confidence, and create a humorous effect through wordplay. This finding demonstrates how flouting the maxim of manner allows speakers to convey implicit meanings while reinforcing the characters' personalities and the film's comedic tone.

2. Violation of Conversational Maxim

In contrast to maxim flouting which is performed overtly, the non-observance of maxims in Thor: Ragnarok (2017) also manifests in the form of maxim violation. A violation of a maxim occurs when a speaker unostentatiously and covertly fails to observe a maxim with the deliberate intention to mislead, deceive, or conceal information from the interlocutor (Mbisike, 2021; Tamrin et al., 2022). Under this condition, the interlocutor is led to assume that the speaker is adhering to the Cooperative Principle, thereby accepting the utterance at face value without realizing that a violation has taken place (Mbisike, 2021). Consequently, unlike flouting, maxim violation does not generate an intended conversational implicature for the hearer to infer, but rather serves as a covert pragmatic tactic to manipulate the interaction (Tamrin et al., 2022).

Unlike flouting which spans across all four maxims, instances of maxim violation in the film's dialogue were exclusively identified within the maxim of quality. Speakers violate the maxim of quality by intentionally delivering statements that are factually untrue, untruthful, or unsupported by adequate evidence (Maulin & Sembodo, 2021; Krause & Vossen, 2024; Miehl et al., 2024). The remaining three categories namely the maxims of quantity, relevance, and manner, yielded no instances of violation. In the context of character interactions, this exclusive reliance on violating the quality maxim functions primarily as a strategic tool for self defense, deception, and psychological manipulation. Rather than inviting the hearer to deduce hidden meanings as seen in flouting, characters utilize covert violations of quality to withhold critical truths, shield their underlying motives, and strategically navigate high-stakes conflict situations. These findings accentuate that while overt flouting enriches the narrative through irony and humor, covert violation serves as an indispensable narrative engine for escalating dramatic tension and constructing complex character dynamics.

2.1 Violation of the Maxim of Quality

Among the 10 instances of maxim violation identified in this study, all were classified as violations of the maxim of quality. This finding indicates that the characters intentionally produced false statements to mislead their interlocutors rather than encourage them to infer an implied meaning. Unlike maxim flouting, which generates conversational implicatures through deliberate non-observance, maxim violation aims to conceal the truth by leading the hearer to accept the utterance as true (Maulin & Sembodo, 2021).

Context: This conversation takes place at the Grandmaster's palace on Sakaar after Thor unexpectedly encounters Loki among the VIP guests. When the Grandmaster asks whether Loki knows Thor, Thor insists that Loki confirm his identity. Instead of telling the truth, Loki immediately denies knowing Thor.

Hogun: *"This is your last warning!"*

Hela: *"I thought you'd be happy to see me."*

0:32:43 – 0:32:49

Loki's utterance is classified as violating the maxim of quality because he intentionally makes a false statement to deceive the Grandmaster. Although Loki and Thor have lived together as brothers for centuries, Loki denies ever meeting him, fully expecting the Grandmaster to believe the lie. Unlike flouting, the utterance is not intended to generate an implicature that the hearer should recognize; instead, it is designed to conceal the truth. Pragmatically, this violation functions as a strategy of self-protection, allowing Loki to maintain his privileged status on Sakaar and avoid becoming involved in Thor's problems. This finding demonstrates how violating

the maxim of quality enables speakers to manipulate information in order to achieve personal objectives while preserving their own interests.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the non-observance of Gricean conversational maxims in the film *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), focusing on the forms of flouting and violation, the types of maxims involved, their underlying conversational implicatures, and their pragmatic communicative functions. Based on the analysis of 47 identified instances, the findings demonstrate that non-observance of maxims in film discourse is not an indicator of communicative failure, rather, it functions as an intentional and strategic pragmatic instrument to convey implicit meanings, drive narrative conflict, and enrich character development.

The results reveal a clear distinction between overt and covert forms of non-observance. Maxim flouting emerged as the predominant form (37 instances), occurring across all four maxim categories, with the maxim of relation being the most frequent (14 instances), followed by quality (12 instances), quantity (7 instances), and manner (4 instances). Characters blatantly flout maxims to generate conversational implicatures that rely on mutual contextual inferencing, serving communicative functions such as producing humor, irony, and sarcasm, as well as deflecting awkward situations and maintaining self-image. Conversely, maxim violation was identified less frequently (10 instances) and operated exclusively within the maxim of quality. Unlike flouting, quality violations are executed covertly without generating implicatures, functioning primarily as deceptive tactics for self preservation, manipulation, and the withholding of critical information to navigate high-stakes conflict.

Ultimately, this research underscores the vital role of pragmatic strategies in audiovisual media, illustrating how the dynamic interplay between flouting and violation shapes conversational interactions. Practically, these findings offer valuable insights for discourse and media studies on how film dialogue uses indirect communication for thematic and dramatic purposes.

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