

AN ANALYSIS OF MAXIM VIOLATIONS IN HOW TO KEEP A CONVERSATION GOING PODCAST

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Abstract: *This study examines violations of conversational maxims in the podcast How to Keep a Conversation Going, published by the YouTube channel Speak English with Class. The research focuses on identifying the types of maxim violations and explaining the communicative reasons behind them, using Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and the pragmatic strategy framework by Cutting (2002). A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the podcast transcript. The findings reveal ten instances of maxim violations across five dialogue segments: six of Quantity, one of Quality, one of Relation, and two of Manner. Some segments show more than one type of violation, reflecting the layered nature of spontaneous speech. These violations were used purposefully to manage interaction, express opinions, soften directness, or enhance engagement. Rather than causing misunderstanding, the strategies supported a smooth and relatable flow in the informal conversation.*

Keyword: *Maxim Violations, Grice's Conversational Maxims, Podcast.*

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is the study of how language is interpreted in context. It examines how speakers convey meaning beyond literal expressions and how listeners understand those meanings through shared knowledge and situation. Yule (1996) explains that pragmatics focuses on how language is used in actual communication, involving speaker intention and contextual interpretation.

One of the key concepts in pragmatics is the Cooperative Principle by Grice (1975), which states that speakers and listeners generally assume cooperation in communication. To support this, Grice proposed four conversational maxims: Quantity, which requires speakers to provide enough information but not more or less than needed; Quality, which emphasizes truthfulness; Relation, which requires relevance; and Manner, which calls for clarity, brevity, and orderliness (Grice, 1975, as cited in Yule, 2010, p. 147).

However, in everyday conversations, these maxims are not always adhered to. Grice (1975, p. 49) notes that speakers may violate a maxim without making it apparent. In this case, the listener only understands the surface meaning, while the speaker intentionally misleads the listener. Thomas (1995, p. 73) refers to this type of violation as "quietly deceiving," where the speaker appears cooperative but is not.

Cutting (2002) provides clear examples of each violation. For instance, violating the maxim of Quantity involves giving too little information. In one example, when a guest asks, "Does your dog bite?" the receptionist replies, "No." After the dog bites the guest, she adds, "That isn't my dog" (Cutting, 2002, p. 40). The receptionist intentionally withholds key information, causing a misunderstanding.

The maxim of Quality is violated when a speaker says something untrue. Cutting (2002) provides an example where a wife, when asked about the cost of her dress, replies, "Thirty-five pounds," even though that is not the actual price (p. 40). This shows a deliberate attempt to mislead the listener with false information.

Violation of the maxim of Relation occurs when the response is not relevant to the question. For example, when the husband asks about the price of a dress, the wife replies, "Let's go out tonight," which avoids answering and changes the topic (Cutting, 2002, p. 40). Here, the speaker shifts the focus rather than giving the expected response.

Finally, the maxim of Manner is violated when a speaker chooses to be vague or unclear. Cutting (2002) describes a response like, “A tiny fraction of my salary, though probably a bigger fraction of the salary of the woman that sold it to me,” as an intentionally obscure way to avoid answering clearly (p. 40). The speaker employs indirect language, making the message difficult to interpret.

These examples demonstrate that violating maxims does not always result in communication failure. Instead, violations can serve pragmatic purposes such as avoiding conflict, protecting feelings, or shifting topics politely. As Cutting (2002) and Thomas (1995) note, such strategies are common in real-life interactions. Taguchi (2011) also explains that recognizing these patterns helps language learners understand meaning beyond literal language.

This study examines how maxim violations appear in the podcast *How to Keep a Conversation Going* from the YouTube channel *Speak English with Class*. The episode features informal dialogue where speakers discuss small talk strategies, making it a rich source of pragmatic features.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative research approach, based on Creswell and Poth’s (2018) framework, which focuses on understanding meaning in context and identifying patterns in natural communication. Because the data involves spontaneous podcast speech, the qualitative method is suitable for exploring interactional context. It helps explain the reasons behind these violations, especially in informal dialogue, where speakers may intentionally break the rules to achieve specific communicative goals.

The data were collected from the transcript, which was directly taken from the official YouTube description of the podcast *How to Keep a Conversation Going*. To analyze the data, the study employed content analysis, a method defined by Krippendorff (2013) as a way to make reliable and meaningful interpretations of texts based on context. This method supported the process of identifying and interpreting instances of conversational maxim violations. These violations were analyzed using Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975) and the pragmatic strategy framework proposed by Cutting (2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of maxim violations found in the podcast *How to Keep a Conversation Going*. A total of ten instances were found across five dialogue segments, including six violations of the maxim of Quantity, one of Quality, one of Relation, and two of Manner. The violation of each maxim is discussed below.

The Violation of The Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of Quantity is violated when the speaker gives either too little or too much information than what is expected in a cooperative conversation. In these cases, the speakers failed to provide adequate responses or gave extended explanations that exceeded what the situation required. This section presents three examples.

(1) [00:00:57 - 00:01:43]

Dialogue:

Erin: So, I was at a networking event, trying to meet new people. I introduced myself to this guy, and I asked, “What do you do?”

Evan: Okay, normal conversation starter. So what did he say?

Erin: He just goes, “I’m an engineer.”

Evan: Okay, fair enough. And then you asked?

Erin: I said, “Oh, cool! What kind of projects do you work on?”

Evan: And let me guess... he said, “Just normal stuff.”

Erin: Bingo! That’s exactly what he said.

Evan: Oof. Did you try again?

Erin: Of course! I asked, “How did you get into the field?” And he just shrugged and

said, "I don't know. Just liked computers."

The speaker's response violates the maxim of Quantity as defined by Grice (1975) because each of his replies offers too little information in response to Erin's specific and open-ended questions. Phrases like "I'm an engineer," "just normal stuff," and "I don't know. Just liked computers" do not give enough detail to maintain a cooperative and meaningful exchange. Erin's repeated efforts to keep the conversation going are met with vague and minimal answers that fail to develop the topic further. This lack of elaboration blocks the natural progression of dialogue and places the entire burden of interaction on Erin.

Based on Cutting's (2002) framework, violations of the Quantity maxim are often used to avoid full engagement, limit personal disclosure, or escape deeper interaction. In this context, the speaker minimizes his contributions, which makes the conversation feel one-sided and prevents any emotional or informational connection. The example demonstrates how under-informing in a social setting can cause conversation breakdown and leave the listener with nothing to build on.

(2) [00:07:27 - 00:08:17]

Dialogue:

Evan: So, how do you actually remove the filter?

Erin: Practice talking without overthinking. Start in low-pressure situations like chatting with a friend or a coworker about something casual. Instead of pausing to analyze your response, just go with whatever comes naturally.

Evan: And if you're really struggling, one trick is to verbalize your thoughts. Instead of filtering yourself, say things like, "I was just thinking about..." or "That reminds me of..." That way, you train yourself to keep talking naturally instead of pausing in self-doubt.

Erin: Yes! And a fun way to practice this is to have conversations where your goal is to speak without pausing for at least 30 seconds. Even if it's not perfect, you'll get used to letting words flow instead of stopping yourself.

The speaker's response violates the maxim of Quantity because the answer given by Erin, followed by Evan, contains more information than what is strictly needed to respond to the original question. Evan only asks, "How do you actually remove the filter?", but the response, "Practice talking without overthinking," "And if you're really struggling, one trick is to verbalize your thoughts," and "A fun way to practice this is to have conversations where your goal is to speak without pausing for at least 30 seconds" becomes an extended explanation, including multiple strategies and even a speaking exercise. While informative, the elaboration goes beyond the expected scope of the question.

According to Cutting's (2002) framework, this kind of over-elaboration often serves a pragmatic purpose. In this context, the excessive detail is used to ensure clarity for listeners and to support the educational function of the podcast. The speakers are not merely engaging in casual conversation, but also guiding the audience. Therefore, the added information supports learning and listener engagement, even though it technically violates the Quantity maxim.

The Violation of The Maxim of Quality

The maxim of Quality is violated when a speaker says something that is not true or not supported by enough evidence. In casual conversations, speakers often use exaggeration or figurative language to convey opinions, feelings, or experiences, even though the literal meaning may not be entirely accurate. This section includes two examples.

(3) [00:01:35 - 00:01:58]

Dialogue:

Erin: ...I asked, "How did you get into the field?" And he just shrugged and said, "I don't know. Just liked computers."

Evan: That's it?! No story, no details, nothing?

Erin: Nothing. At that point, I was struggling. I tried throwing him conversation lifelines, but he just let them sink. It felt like I was talking to an auto-reply bot.

The speaker's response violates the maxim of Quality as defined by Grice (1975), since Erin's comparison "it felt like I was talking to an auto-reply bot" is an exaggeration that is not true. The person she talked to was human, but she used a figurative expression to emphasize how robotic and unengaged the interaction felt. This hyperbolic metaphor breaks the expectation of truthfulness and sincerity in cooperative conversation.

Based on Cutting's (2002) framework, this type of violation is commonly used to express frustration, sarcasm, or emotional emphasis. Instead of misleading the listener, the exaggeration creates a vivid picture of the speaker's experience, making it more relatable and emotionally engaging. In the same sequence, the statement "I just liked computers" also reflects a lack of sincerity or oversimplification, which further weakens the credibility of the response. This simplification may be used to avoid elaborating or to escape deeper involvement in the interaction. Both expressions show how violating the Quality maxim can serve as a strategy to signal dissatisfaction, dismissiveness, or emotional detachment while still contributing to the flow of informal conversation.

The Violation of The Maxim of Relation

The maxim of Relation is violated when a speaker says something that is not relevant to the previous utterance. In spontaneous or informal conversations, this violation is often used to change topics, interrupt politely, or steer the interaction in a new direction. This section presents one example.

(4) [00:00:24 - 00:00:40]

Dialogue:

Erin: And if you're a returning listener, welcome back! We love having you here, and we appreciate every single one of you tuning in.

Evan: Hey Erin, random question have you ever met someone who just completely shuts down a conversation?

The speaker's response violates the maxim of Relation because Evan abruptly changes the topic without an apparent connection to Erin's opening remark. While Erin is still addressing the audience with a greeting and appreciation, Evan suddenly introduces a personal and unrelated question: "...have you ever met someone who just completely shuts down a conversation?" This shift disregards the expected flow of the podcast's structure and undermines its topical relevance.

According to Cutting's (2002) framework, such violations of Relation are often used to steer the topic toward the main subject or avoid predictable dialogue. In this case, Evan's shift may serve as a strategy to move the conversation toward the episode's theme, how conversations fail. Though technically irrelevant to Erin's sentence, the change guides listeners into the main content in a casual, spontaneous way.

The Violation of The Maxim of Manner

The maxim of Manner is violated when a speaker expresses something in a way that is unclear, vague, or unnecessarily complicated. This type of violation can make communication less effective, forcing the listener to request clarification. The following examples illustrate how unclear responses can disrupt the flow of conversation.

(5) [00:01:35 - 00:02:07]

Dialogue:

Erin: "Of course! I asked, 'How did you get into the field?' And he just shrugged and said, 'I don't know. Just liked computers.'"

Evan: That's it?! No story, no details, nothing?

Erin: "Nothing. I was struggling. I tried throwing him conversation lifelines, but he just let them sink..."

Evan: "That is painful. It's like trying to keep a balloon in the air, but every time you hit it up, it just falls straight back down."

Erin: I know, right? A good conversation is like a fire it needs energy from both sides to keep burning.

The speaker's response violates the maxim of Manner as defined by Grice (1975) because both speakers use metaphorical language instead of providing clear, direct descriptions. Erin uses the expression "throwing him conversation lifelines" to describe her attempts to keep the discussion going, and Evan compares the failed interaction to "trying to keep a balloon in the air... it just falls straight back down." These figurative phrases add vivid imagery but reduce clarity, making the intended meaning less immediately accessible.

According to Cutting's (2002) framework, such violations are often employed to convey emotional reactions in a more relatable or creative manner. In this case, the use of metaphor emphasizes the difficulty and imbalance in the exchange without stating it outright. These expressions enhance the storytelling and connect with listeners on an emotional level. While they technically violate the maxim of Manner by being indirect, they enrich the conversation and reflect the speakers' effort to communicate frustration and social dynamics through imagery.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed violations of Grice's conversational maxims in the podcast *How to Keep a Conversation Going* from the YouTube channel *Speak English with Class*. Ten instances were identified across five dialogue segments: six violations of Quantity, one of Quality, one of Relation, and two of Manner. Each case was examined based on the speaker's response, context, and communicative impact.

The findings show that the violations were intentional and served specific purposes. The speakers provided too much or too little information, exaggerated, changed topics, or used vague language to manage interaction. These strategies helped express emotion, soften directness, reduce pressure, or make the dialogue more relatable. The results confirm that in informal settings, such as podcasts, maxim violations are common and often intentional. Rather than disrupting communication, they support clarity, sustain engagement, and help balance social interaction depending on context.

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