Flouting Conversational Maxims: A Study on Student Communication in Grade 9 Maroon

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: To investigate students' communication habits, know the causes of maxim flouting, and offer practical suggestions for enhancing class conversations.

Methodology: This study used a qualitative research design, specifically discourse analysis, to investigate the flouting of conversational maxims in classroom interactions among Grade 9 Maroon students at Esperanza National High School. The study's participants comprised 30 Grade 9 students from Esperanza National High School's Maroon section. Purposive sampling was used and the data are collected through observation and audio recordings.

Main Findings: The study revealed that flouting conversational maxims is widespread in classroom settings, especially among Grade 9 Maroon students. During discussions, students flouted all conversational maxims. The Maxim of Relationship (Relevance) is the most flouted maxim.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study contributes originality by examining the systematic flouting of Gricean maxims in real classroom interactions among Grade 9 students, a context underexplored in pragmatic research. Unlike previous studies focusing on teachers or digital platforms, it highlights how humor, indirectness, and over-explanation function as both challenges and learning opportunities, offering practical strategies to enhance classroom communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential function in both personal and professional settings. At its essence, it means "to share," and it can take many different forms. Understanding what communication is and how it works is critical to developing good connections and attaining success in any industry. Communication is important to education because it connects instructional strategies or methods on how students learn. An effective sharing of information and management of the classroom are made possible by clear communication, which can improve the relationships of the students and the teachers.

According to Karasova & Kleckova [1], communication skills among teachers are essential for effective classroom management. Teachers who use excellent communication skills and appropriate communication tactics are more likely to enhance learner autonomy, engagement, self-concept, well-being, or accountability and succeed in behavior management. Effective communication is the foundation of successful classroom

management. It allows you to communicate with your students, direct their learning experiences, and control classroom dynamics.

Effective communication is important for academic success as it helps share information and helps students improve their critical thinking and social skills. Communication in the classroom often follows unspoken rules that help students understand and work together. Grice's theory of conversational maxims, which includes the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, explains how people can have clear and effective conversations [2]. These maxims help speakers convey enough information, be honest, stay on topic, and talk clearly. However, in real-life conversation, particularly with teens, these rules are frequently ignored. This can result in complex, sometimes unpredictable communication.

This study investigates how Grade 9 students follow or purposefully ignore these conversation rules in the classroom. Flouting a maxim, rather than accidentally breaking it, is done to convey a hidden meaning and is frequently influenced by social context, humor, sarcasm, or the need to manage relationships. Teachers need to understand these instances of maxim flouting because they demonstrate students' social skills, communication strategies, and potential difficulties in effective communication. This study's main goals are to first determine which of Grice's conversational maxims Grade 9 Maroon students most flouted and then examine the situations in which this flouting takes place during class interactions.

The purpose of this study is to investigate students' communication habits, know the causes of maxim flouting, and offer practical suggestions for enhancing class conversations. This study will contribute to the study of language and communication, as well as provide teachers with valuable insights for understanding and responding to students' communication. This will help to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective communication in the field of linguistic pragmatics depends on interlocutors working together. The Cooperative Principle, first proposed by philosopher Grice, holds that to promote meaningful interactions, discussion participants generally follow certain rules. Four verbal maxims serve as a framework for this idea: First, the Maxim of Quantity: For the sake of the trade at hand, give just enough information without going overboard. Second, the Maxim of Quality: Try to tell the truth and refrain from making claims you do not have proof for or those you think are untrue. Next, the Maxim of Relation: Make sure your comments are pertinent to the discussion's current context. Lastly, the maxim of manners states that you should communicate intelligibly and without needless complication.

These maxims foster mutual comprehension and clarity by acting as fundamental rules for conversational behavior. Grice called this phenomenon "conversational implicature." In natural discourse, however, speakers frequently purposefully disregard these maxims to convey implicit meanings. This can be done for a variety of communicative purposes, such as the management of social relationships and the use of humor, sarcasm, or emphasis.

Students' willful disregard for conversational maxims in educational contexts, especially in classroom interactions, can provide information about their social dynamics and communication styles. A student may violate the Maxim of Relation, for example, by responding off-topic, which could be an indication that they want to change the subject or add humor. In a similar vein, providing little information in violation of the Maxim of Quantity may imply hesitation or uncertainty.

These dynamics have been investigated empirically in educational settings. In their analysis of teacher-student interactions, Wahyudi et al. [3] found that, depending on the situation and goal, both parties had violated several maxims, which might have resulted in confusion or increased involvement. Another study by Ngo et al. [4] looked at teacher-student interactions in movies and found that breaking the rules frequently helped to move the plot along and build character relationships, reflecting the complexity of communication in real life.Teachers can gain a greater understanding of student behavior and classroom dynamics by knowing the situations and frequency in which students violate these maxims. A more efficient and adaptable learning environment can be created by using instructional practices that recognize and address the root causes of maxim flouting.

A maxim represents a short statement which expresses a universal truth or principle or rule of conduct. The term originates from the Latin maxima propositio which translates to "greatest proposition" to represent a leading principle. Maxims derive from proverbs and aphorisms to serve as life philosophies which guide people through intricate social circumstances. Linguistics defines Gricean maxims as the four conversational principles developed by Paul Grice in 1975 which establish the fundamental rules for effective communication. The Cooperative Principle of Grice includes these maxims which state that speakers normally strive to provide both informative and truthful content that remains relevant and clear during conversations [5]. The intentional violation of these maxims by speakers leads to conversational implicatures which allow listeners to infer their intended meaning through contextual understanding [6].

Research shows that these maxims function in classroom discourse while students and teachers break them during their interactions. The research by Wahyudi et al. [3] shows teachers break the quantity maxim by delivering too much information which leads students to become confused or disconnected from the lesson. Ngo et al. [4] studied Philippine classrooms where both teachers and students frequently break maxims especially quantity and relevance to create engagement or simplify complex topics. The violations of these maxims function as educational tools to explain material while controlling classroom interactions and building relationships which demonstrates that non-compliance with maxims can create positive effects in educational contexts.

Averina [7] showed that purposeful violations particularly in classrooms can boost student engagement or make instructions more palatable and even humorous. Gultom [8] studied online classrooms to show that gender affected maxim flouting because female students gave more detailed information to clarify and verify understanding which violated the quantity maxim while reflecting social and cultural elements. Remote learning brought additional challenges to the educational environment. Students in virtual classrooms frequently make off-topic remarks which violate the maxim of relation. The informal exchanges between students show similarities with Ngo et al., [4] and Dewi [9] who found digital casualness increased while students became less strict about conversational rules which created more welcoming learning spaces.

The essential function of maxims in communication receives support from Hossain [10] and Goni et al. [11] who demonstrated how Gricean principles enable mutual understanding. Westby [12] observed that people with autism spectrum disorder face challenges with these principles which demonstrate the pragmatic boundaries of Grice's theory. Wu [13] criticized how the theory fails to work across different cultural backgrounds and cognitive skill levels. From a developmental point of view, Eskritt et al., [14] found that even young children are aware of when maxim violations happen, which suggests that they understand pragmatic communication at an early age. Hamdi [15] used these ideas to look at the media and show how comedic effects, like those in The Ali G Show, depend on breaking rules on purpose.

Grice's rules also apply to writing fiction and literature. Authors use them to make dialogue sound real and keep the story together [16]. Writers break maxims on purpose to show how deep a character is or to move the plot forward. This shows that maxims can be used in more than just everyday conversation. Researchers in the Philippines have used Grice's theory to look at many different types of communication, such as law, politics, the media, and education. Ceballos and Sosas [17] found that all four maxims were broken in legal cases, and they blamed this on strategic ambiguity and legal jargon. Flaire (n.d.) also looked at political speech during Philippine Senate hearings and how politicians break rules to get an edge in rhetoric.

These violations can also be seen in media that is funny or entertaining. Irony and sarcasm often come from flouting, especially when it's meant to be funny. Manurung [18] showed how talk shows in the Philippines use maxim flouting to get people more involved. Dogcol and Villanueva [19] found that news on social media sites often breaks rules, whether on purpose or not, which changes how Filipinos understand news. In educational settings, Ngo et al., [4] looked specifically at classrooms in the Philippines. Their results back up what Wahyudi said: teachers break rules on purpose (especially those about relevance and quantity) to make explanations easier to understand, get students to participate, or boost their confidence. Using violations in this way goes against the idea that following the rules always leads to good communication.

Digital content creation is another example of intentional flouting. Filipino vloggers break rules to seem more real and connect with their viewers more deeply [20]. Nanda et al., [21] and Rosyidah [22] also wrote about how game shows and political debates break maxims, showing how these kinds of strategies can be used to persuade and entertain. In general, these studies show that breaking maxims doesn't always mean that communication has failed. Instead, they often serve functional, rhetorical, or relational purposes, especially in educational, cultural, or political settings. The case of the Philippines shows how changes in culture, the media, and education can affect how maxims are understood, ignored, or used on purpose. Future studies should look into how these kinds of violations affect how people see, understand, and trust across different types of communication.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Setting

The study was conducted at Esperanza National High School, focusing only on the Grade 9 Maroon section. The classroom was selected for its accessible research environment and dynamic verbal interaction. As a context-specific case study, the research findings are necessarily limited to this specific classroom environment and are not intended to be applied to other educational situations.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study included 30 Grade 9 students from the Maroon section. These individuals were chosen based on their active participation in class discussions and various communication methods.

3.3. Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in the study to find participants who exhibited a wide range of verbal behaviors relevant to the inquiry. Parental and student consent were obtained to assure ethical participation. This sampling approach allows for the identification of students who could provide valuable data on the flouting of conversational maxims.

3.4. Instruments

The primary instruments used for data collection were audio recorders and observation checklists. The audio recorders were utilized to capture natural classroom interactions, while the observation checklists guided the researchers in identifying instances of verbal exchanges. These tools facilitated accurate documentation and analysis of communication practices in the classroom.

3.5. Procedure

Observations were conducted over a one-week period, encompassing three class sessions. Each session lasted about 60 minutes, in accordance with the regular class schedule. The teacher stayed present and taught as normal, with limited researcher intervention to maintain the realism of classroom interaction. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to represent the real student statements and discussion flow. Transcriptions kept informal speech patterns and contextual markers, allowing for reliable pragmatic analysis.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a systematic discourse-analytic technique based on Grice's (1975) notion of conversational maxims. The process began with the identification of utterances in the transcripts that potentially flouted one or more maxims, namely quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Each identified statement was then classified according to the specific maxim it violated. Following this, the context and intent of the utterance were interpreted to determine whether the flouting served rhetorical, comic, or instructive purposes. The next step involved quantifying the instances of maxim flouting by category to reveal patterns and frequencies. Through this multi-step procedure, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of how and why conversational maxims were flouted in the observed classroom interactions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers' goal in this section is to provide and explain the study's findings. After gathering and thoroughly evaluating the study's data, the researchers discovered that the teacher and students flouted all four maxims throughout English classroom interactions.

Table 1. Flouting of Maxims – Bias and Prejudice Discussion

Maxim Flouted	Speaker	Quote	Context	Violation	Implication
Relation (Relevance)	Student 4	"Uh… Ma'am, ang sarap ng ulam sa canteen ngayon, noh?" Translation: (Uh... Ma'am, the food in the canteen is delicious today, right?)	Asked about bias/prejudice in society	Irrelevant response	Attempt to add humor or distract
Quality (Truthfulness)	Student 5	"Sabi ng kuya ko, 'Pang-babae lang ang kulay pink." Translation: (Ma'am, my older brother says, "Pink is only for girls,")	Shared example of gender bias	Unsupported generalization	Shows lack of evidence for claim
Manner (Clarity)	Student 7	"Kapag tinanong kung racist ba siya, minsan sagot lang, 'Marami akong friends na ibang lahi.'" Translation:(When asked if someone is racist, they sometimes just say, "I have many friends from other races.")	Asked about avoiding prejudice questions	Indirect, vague answer	Avoids directly addressing the issue
Quantity (Information)	Student 6	"Kapag laging active sa class, mas mabait sila kahit	Describing favoritism as	Over-explains example	Adds unnecessary

minsan mali." Translation: (If you are always active in class, they treat you better even if your answer is wrong sometimes.)		bias	detail, distracts focus

The students flouted several maxims in this discussion such as relation, quality, manner and quantity for a variety of reasons, including irrelevant response, unsupported generalization, indirect and vague answer, and over-explaining. The teacher expertly steered the debate back on track, demonstrating how maxim flouting can reveal underlying communication techniques, particularly when dealing with sensitive themes like bias and prejudice.

Table 2. Flouting of Maxims – Evidence in Arguments

Maxim Flouted	Speaker	Quote	Context	Violation	Implication
Relation (Relevance)	Student 2	"Did you know that cats sleep 12–16 hours a day?"	Asked for a fact on argumentation	Off-topic fact	Misunderstood or attempted humor
Quantity (Information)	Student 5	"My cousin studied all night and still failed—so studying is useless."	Example of anecdotal evidence	Overgeneralization	Draws broad claim from a single case
Quality (Truthfulness)	Student 3	"9 out of 10 students say they procrastinate."	Example of statistics	No source given	Possibly made-up figure; undermines validity

Students frequently subtly flout conversational maxims during class debates, according to the study of this exchange. Relation was the most frequently maxim, as demonstrated by Student 2's irrelevant cat-related comment. This could indicate a need for more precise instructions or a tactic to lighten the atmosphere. A misinterpretation of anecdotal evidence is demonstrated by Student 5's overgeneralization, which flouts the quantity maxim. In the meantime, the difficulty of guaranteeing factual correctness when utilizing statistics in arguments is highlighted by Student 3's possible violation of the quality maxim. Overall, the conversation shows how maxim flouting can serve a variety of reasons. The teacher's comments effectively addressed these deviations, directing students back to the learning objectives while preserving an open and collaborative environment.

Table 3. Flouting of Maxims – Types of Evidence (Part 2)

Maxim Flouted	Speaker	Quote	Context	Violation	Implication
Relation (Relevance)	Student 3	"Alam niyo ba 'yung aso ng kapitbahay namin marunong magbukas ng gate?" Translation: Did you know our neighbor has a dog that can open the gate? I mean, it unlocks it using its snout.	Asked for anecdotal evidence about arguments	Irrelevant story	Misunderstood criteria; adds humor
Relation (Relevance)	Student 5	"Kung ang pag-inom ng kape nakakapagpuyat, edi ang kanin nakakaputi?" Translation: (If drinking coffee keeps you awake, does eating rice make you fair-skinned?)	Asked for analogical evidence	Illogical comparison	Humorous but derails topic
Quality (Truthfulness)	Student 3	"Sabi ng tito ko, baka reincarnation daw 'yun ng guard dog namin dati." Translation: My uncle said	Expanded dog story into 'testimonial'	Implausible claim	Humorous exaggeration

		it might be the reincarnation of our old guard dog.			
Quantity (Information)	Student 3	"Personal experience ko 'yun! So anecdotal evidence na rin, 'di ba?" Translation: (Well, Ma'am, that is my personal experience, so it is anecdotal evidence, right?)	Justifying off-topic story	Over-explains point	Adds unnecessary detail to defend joke

The most flouted maxim in this conversation is Relation, as evidenced by both Student 3's dog narrative and Student 5's lighthearted simile. These examples show that students occasionally steer conversations off subject, either on purpose or because they misunderstand the task. The Quality Maxim is also flouted through overstated or absurd assertions, which adds humor to the debate. There is little flouting of the Manner Maxim, as the pupils' comments are often straightforward, even when irrelevant. The Quantity Maxim is somewhat flouted in attempts to justify off-topic responses, demonstrating how students may overexplain to defend their answers. The conversation illustrates how playfulness and humor can result in the flouting of conversational maxims. This may break up the flow of the lesson, but it also shows that the classroom is open and welcoming. This is skillfully handled by the instructor, who acknowledges the comedy while guiding the class back to the subject.

Table 4. Summary of Maxim Flouting Patterns

Most Flouted Maxim	Examples	Likely Reasons	Teaching Implication
Relation (Relevance)	Dog anecdote, cat fact, rice simile	Humor, distraction, misinterpretation	Give clear examples and reinforce topic boundaries
Quality (Truthfulness)	Reincarnation claim, fake statistics	Exaggeration, lack of source-checking	Emphasize evidence-based reasoning
Quantity (Information)	Over-detailed explanations	Justifying answers, student engagement	Encourage concise and focused responses
Manner (Clarity)	Indirect racist claim defense	Social sensitivity	Encourage direct and respectful communication

This study shows that students from Grade 9- Maroon often flouted Grice's conversational maxims, particularly the Maxim of Relation (Relevance), throughout classroom discussions. This occurs because students get distracted, use humor, and/or try to participate in their way. Though these moments can sometimes disturb the lesson, they also give awareness into how students interact, avoid uncomfortable topics, or try to contribute in ways that make sense to them.

According to the study, to keep students focused and maintain classroom engagement, teachers must provide clear directions and facilitate structured discussions. The Maxim of Quality (Truthfulness) is frequently flouted, which implies that students could gain from exercises or activities that enhance their capacity for critical thinking and the use of evidence in making claims. These findings can assist teachers in developing more effective classroom management techniques that maintain a balance between enjoyment and concentration. Future studies should examine if teaching strategies can improve students' communication skills and how purposeful maxim flouting affects student comprehension.

According to the study, Grade 9 Maroon students' flouting conversational maxims is not random; rather, it adheres to standard communication patterns, particularly in classroom settings. According to Wahyudi et al., [3] both teachers and students frequently flout these communication guidelines, which, depending on how they are handled, can either lead to misunderstandings or make conversations more interesting. Similarly, Ngo et al. [4] discovered that breaking maxims is typical in classroom discussions and can be used for a variety of reasons, such as making jokes, fostering relationships, or avoiding uncomfortable topics. A study by Gultom [7] also suggests that as digital platforms promote more casual communication, online learning may potentially have an impact on how students flout maxims. This is consistent with the study's findings that students frequently used humor or went off subject, which could be impacted by their online communication style.

Additionally, the study showed that students frequently flout the Maxim of Quality, which raises questions about their capacity for critical thought and for supporting their statements with evidence. According to Hossain [10] and Goni et al., [11], clear and effective communication requires adherence to conversational maxims. Teachers should, therefore, help students understand how to apply these guidelines properly to enhance class discussions as well as identify when they flout them. Overall, the study supports the idea that, although conversational maxims enable clear communication, there are several learning objectives when they are broken.

The findings suggest that teachers ought to be aware of different communication styles and guide students on how to use language effectively while staying focused in the classroom.

To foster effective communication and enhance learning in classrooms where conversational maxims are frequently flouted, several strategies can be implemented across teacher practices, student activities, and broader communication approaches. From the teacher's perspective, the use of explicit verbal cues and clearly stated expectations can help maintain topic relevancy and reduce random or off-topic remarks [23]-[25]. Humor, while valuable for engagement, should be managed through structured opportunities such as warm-up activities or informal intervals, ensuring it does not derail academic discussions. Teachers should also recognize ambiguous or overstated statements and guide students toward clearer, evidence-based reasoning.

For students, targeted activities can strengthen their communication skills. Role-playing and modeling exercises offer opportunities to practice making concise, respectful, and topic-relevant contributions. Discussion-based assignments can further encourage students to identify and correct communication breakdowns arising from maxim flouting. Reflective language tasks also help learners analyze why certain remarks were off-topic or imprecise, deepening their awareness of effective communication practices [26]-[28].

In terms of broader communication practices, teaching students directly about Grice's maxims using real-world classroom examples can illustrate both successful and problematic exchanges [29], [30]. Maxim flouting itself can be reframed as a metacognitive strategy, allowing students to explore how language functions in academic and social contexts. Additionally, incorporating peer feedback during group work promotes shared responsibility in keeping discussions relevant, clear, and truthful. Together, these strategies create a supportive environment where students learn to balance engagement with effective and purposeful communication.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings highlight several important aspects of student communication practices, classroom dynamics, and opportunities for pragmatic development. In terms of student communication, flouting conversational maxims often demonstrated active engagement, as students used humor, storytelling, and over-explanation to participate, connect with peers, or process their thoughts aloud. Indirectness in responses also reflected social awareness, particularly when students addressed sensitive themes with imprecise or roundabout answers, showing their understanding of politeness norms. At the same time, certain instances of flouting, such as exaggerated statements or ambiguous reasoning, indicated developmental needs related to critical thinking and the use of evidence.

Regarding classroom communication dynamics, the analysis revealed that relevance often needed reinforcement, as frequent off-topic remarks highlighted the importance of teachers in framing and maintaining focus during discussions. Humor emerged as both a valuable tool and a potential challenge; while it encouraged participation and engagement, it also had the capacity to derail conversations when unstructured or excessive. In this context, teacher responsiveness played a crucial role, as the ability to redirect discussions, acknowledge humor, and sustain academic momentum was essential to fostering effective discourse.

Finally, the study underscored several opportunities for pragmatic development. Flouting maxims, when properly addressed, could serve as an educational tool by helping students reflect on their language choices and develop into more effective communicators. Additionally, students required support in learning how to make appropriate language choices, particularly in expressing humor, disagreement, or confusion, in ways that enriched rather than disrupted classroom discussions.

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