

## The Violation of Conversational Maxims in the Movie Series *Divergent*

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### ABSTRACT

This research focuses on identifying the types of conversational maxims violated by the characters in a feature film trilogy entitled *The Divergent Series*. This research also aims to explain the functions of the violation of conversational maxims in the series. The result shows that there are 100 violations of conversational maxim in *Divergent series*, and among those, there are 43 violations of maxim of relevance (43%), which is the most frequently occurred in the movie. The second violation identified is the violation of maxim of manner, which reaches 24 violations (24%), and the third frequently occurring violation is violations of maxim of quantity with 22 numbers of violation (22%). The least occurring violation found in the movie is violation of the maxim of quality, which reaches 11 numbers of violation (11%). There are several functions of the violation of conversational maxim found in the movie: keeping a secret, concealing half of the information, avoiding certain topic/question, and confusing the hearer.

**Keywords:** *Divergent series, cooperative principle, conversational maxims, violation of conversational maxims.*

### INTRODUCTION

People use many kinds of ways to make the conversation with their pairs interactive. Those varieties are applied to define types and characteristics of a conversation. People are also required to cooperate with each other in order to make the conversation work well. Grice (1975) proposes a theory about cooperative principles in conversation, which consists of four pragmatic sub principles. Those four pragmatic sub principles are called maxims. However, a conversation can still be understood even though it does not follow the cooperative principles. When cooperative principles are violated, the role of contexts takes their functions to create implicatures. Grice (1975) states that there

are five ways of failing in the observance of the maxims; such as flouting conversational maxims, violating conversational maxims, infringing conversational maxims, opting out conversational maxims, and suspending conversational maxims. This research uses cooperative principles to observe the violation of conversational maxims by the characters in a film trilogy entitled *The Divergent Series*.

This study examined the *Divergent* movie series: *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant*. This series tells about the life of America's young-adults in the dystopian world. Their life is divided into 5 factions. The founder of the city intentionally creates the factions to prevent the rebellion which is caused by human nature. Consequently, people living in

that city do not have freedom to think and act differently. Once they try to fight against the rules, they will be slaughtered. The people must be really careful when they want to do or to say something, and thus, they tend to violate cooperative principles in their conversation. This study aims to investigate the way the characters in the movies violate the maxims and to find out the purpose of the violations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As violations of conversational maxims play an important role in a conversation, many studies have been made to examine violations from different points of view. This section will review prior studies in the same area.

Salvatore Attardo (1993), for example, focuses on the paradox of the communicative nature of jokes. This research tries to argue against the application of the theory of violation of conversational maxims in jokes to explain the paradox. The research presents how speakers exploit the non-cooperative nature of humor for other communicative purposes.

Another study on violations was done by Ephratt (2012) entitled “We try harder” – Silence and Grice’s Cooperative Principle, Maxims, and Implicatures. This study examines whether silence as a means of communication alongside speech as in *We Try Harder* is a case of the addresser’s failure to satisfy Grice’s cooperative principle, or when it is seen as meaningful symbols, such cases can be seen as complying with the cooperative principle. The findings highlight the active role played by verbal silence in communication.

The third study is conducted by Qassemi, Ziabari, and Kheirabadi (2018). Their study focuses on Grice’s Cooperative Principles in News Reports of *Tehran Times*. The aims of this research are to compare the adoption and violation of Grice’s cooperative principles in news reports published in *Tehran Times* and identify which maxim has been violated most and which has been violated least. This research uses 120 news stories which were selected

randomly from the newspaper *Tehran Times*. The results shows that maxim of quality was violated most, while maxim of relation was violated least.

Another research on violations on maxim related to humor is done by Pan (2012). This study focuses on examining the process of language humor from the perspective of Grice’s cooperative principles. This study also explains the relation between creation of humor and violation of cooperative principles.

The fifth research is taken from a thesis written by Mustikawati (2016). This study aims to identify the violation of conversational maxims done by the characters in the movie of *Tomorrowland* and to analyze the implicature of each violation of conversational maxims in the movie. The result shows that the most violated conversational maxim in the movie is maxim of quantity, and she concludes that each violation of conversational maxim has various implicature which is supported by the reason why the characters violate the maxim.

The last study entitled “The Flouting of Conversational Maxims in *Gossip Girl TV Series* is done by Nayadheyu (2016). This study uses TV series as the object of the research and the focus is on the non-observance maxims especially on the flouting of conversational maxims. The objectives of her study are to describe the types of cooperative principle used in *Gossip Girl TV Series* and to find the implicature of each utterance that flouts the conversational maxims in *Gossip Girl TV Series*. In the end, the research finds the maxims of quality and manner are the most frequently flouted maxims by the main characters in *Gossip Girl TV Series* with various reasons. For the requirement of understanding the conversation, she finds implicatures in every dialogue that is flouted by the main characters.

The current study attempts to investigate the violation of conversational maxims in *The Divergent Series*. The series provide many examples of the violations which are committed by the characters in the movies based on several backgrounds. This study also examines the functions of the violations committed by the characters in the movie *Divergent Series*.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section attempts to elaborate the theoretical framework of this study. It consists of cooperative principle, non-observance of maxims, and context.

### Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle is firstly introduced by Grice (1975). He states that in making a conversation, there will be needed cooperation between the speaker and the hearer. Grice (1975) proposes the cooperative principle which consists of four conversational maxims. The four conversational maxims are:

#### *Maxim of Quantity*

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)
- Do not make the contribution more informative than is required

#### *Maxim of Quality*

- Do not say what you believe to be false
- Do not say that which you lack adequate evidence

#### *Maxim of Relation*

- Be relevant

#### *Maxim of Manner*

- Be perspicuous
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- Be orderly

### Non-Observance of Maxims

Grice (1975) proposes the cooperative principle to create a good conversation but he also adds that people cannot be consistent in following the principle. Sometimes, a conversation is only made on

one's own way. Therefore, Grice (1975) states five ways in failing the cooperative principle, also called non-observance of maxims. The five ways of non-observance maxims are flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, infringing, opting out a maxim, and suspending a maxim.

According to Cutting (2002, p. 35), flouting a maxim happens when speakers appear not to follow the maxims but expect the hearer to appreciate the meaning implied. Thus, it can be assumed that the speaker wants to flout the maxim intentionally. Below is an example taken from Cutting (2002, p. 37) of the flouting of the relation maxim:

(1) A: Well how do I look?

B: Your *shoes* are nice...

B does not say that the sweatshirt and jeans do not look nice, but he knows that A will understand that implication, because A asks about his whole appearance and only gets told about part of it.

Then, violation of conversational maxims happens when the speaker know that the hearer will not know the truth and will only understand the surface meaning of the words (Cutting, 2002, p. 38). They intentionally generate a misleading implicature (Thomas, 1995, p. 73). Here is an example of the violation of a conversational maxim (Cutting, 2002, p. 40).

(2) Husband: How much did that new dress cost, darling?

Wife: Less than the last one.

Here, the wife covers up the price of the dress by not saying *how much* less than the last dress. The wife, when asked about the price of the new dress, could have violated the maxim of quality by not being sincere.

The third way of failing the observance maxims by Grice (1975) is infringing conversational maxims. Grice (1975) states (as cited in Cutting, 2002, p. 39), a speaker infringing a maxim fails to observe a maxim because of their fact linguistic performance. This can happen if the speaker has an imperfect command of the language (a child or a foreign learner), if their performance is impaired (nervousness, drunkenness, excitement), if they have a cognitive impairment, or if they are simply incapable of speaking clearly (Thomas 1995, p. 74).

The next way of failing the observance maxims is opting out of the maxims. A speaker opting out of a maxim indicates an unwillingness to cooperate, although they do not want to appear uncooperative (Cutting 2002, p. 40). For example, a priest or counselor refusing to repeat information given in confidence, and a police officer refusing to release the name of an accident victim until the relatives have been informed (Thomas, 1995).

The last way of failing the observance maxims is suspending a maxim. It happens when the hearer assumes what the speaker means as something untrue or taboo. It may be due to cultural differences that a speaker suspends a maxim or the nature of certain events or situations (Thomas, 1995).

### Conversational Implicature

To imply is to hint, suggest or convey some meaning indirectly by means of language (Thomas 1995:58). There are two different types of implicature according to Grice (1975): conversational implicature and conventional implicature. This research only focuses on conversational implicature. It is an implicature which brings different meanings in different contexts. Conversational implicatures are divided into two: generalized and particularized conversational implicature. Generalized conversational implicature is an implicature which does not depend on context. There is no specific information emerges in the context to find the implied meaning. On the other hand, particularized conversational implicature is an implicature which depends mostly on context. Thus, specific information is needed in the context to make the speaker's meaning clearer.

### Context

Mey (1993, p. 39) defines context as a dynamic, not a static concept: it is to be understood as the continually changing surroundings, in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact, and in which the linguistic expressions of their interaction become intelligible. As it is mentioned before that context takes an important role in a conversation. If the conversation itself does not follow the cooperative

principle, the only way which is possible for the reader to make an assumption by using the context.

## METHODS

The data sources of this research are taken from three movies, which are *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant*. The first movie entitled *Divergent* is directed by Neil Burger and released on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014. The second movie is directed by Robert Schwentke and released on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The last series of the movie entitled *Allegiant* is directed by Robert Schwentke and released on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

The data were utterances which are categorized as the violations of conversational maxims. Utterance itself is defined as a natural unit of speech bounded by breaths or pauses. For convenience, we collected the data from the subtitles obtained from [www.subscene.com](http://www.subscene.com) instead of transcribing the movie dialogues. The movies are used to understand and describe the context of each data.

In analyzing the data, there were some procedures required as follows. First of all, the data of the violation maxims were sorted based on the type of maxim which was violated in the conversation depending on the cooperative principles proposed by Grice (1975); maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. Later, the sorted data were identified using a theory by Cutting (2002) which focused on maxim non-observance. Apart from classifying the type of maxims, this research also worked on the violation of the maxims.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Altogether 100 maxim violations were observed in the *Divergent* movie Series. These violations were classified using Grice's theory of cooperative principle. This section discusses the findings of the violation of conversational maxims. Table 1 below presents the frequency of the violations of the conversational maxims in the movie *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant*.

Table 1. The frequency of violations of cooperative principle in the movie *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant*

No.	Maxim Violation	Token	%
1.	Maxim of Quality	11	11
2.	Maxim of Quantity	22	22
3.	Maxim of Relevance	43	43
4.	Maxim of Manner	24	24
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The most frequently occurring violation is the one that violates maxim of relevance and the least occurring violation is the one that violates maxim of quality. The author identifies that there are 43 violations of maxim of relevance (43%). The second frequently occurring violation identified is the violation of maxim of manner which reaches 24 numbers of violation (24%). The third frequently occurring violation is the one that violates maxim of quantity which reaches 22 numbers of violation (22%) and the least occurring violation is the one that violates maxim of quality which reaches 11 numbers of violation (11%). The following sub-sections present and discuss in detail the violations of each maxim.

### Violation of Quality Maxim

Maxim of quality requires the speaker to give the right information and it has to be supported by strong evidence. If those two criteria are not fulfilled, it can be considered that the speaker violates the maxim. The examples of the violations of maxim of quality included the context of each conversation are presented below.

(3) 00:38:10,561 --> 00:38:17,748 (I)

**Context:** Scene happens at the candor's base when Tris, the main character meet Christina, the main character's friend after they separated for a long time. Christina asks Tris whether she knows Will's, the main character's friend whereabouts. Tris who seems to hesitate to tell Christina tells her that she does not know.

Christina: Have you heard anything about Will?

Tris: No.

The dialogue in the second movie *Insurgent* which happens between Christina and Tris, two members of dauntless, is considered a violation. It happens when Tris finally meets Christina. They live separately because of the chaos of the war. Christina seems to be worried about the condition of her friend, Will, and asks Tris whether she knows Will's condition. Actually Tris knows that Will already passed away but she is not ready yet to tell Christina about the truth because she is the reason why Will died. In the first movie, it is told that Will is under simulation and he is about to shoot Tris but Tris who is conscious stops Will but she cannot. In the end she shoots Will. Thus, Tris violates the maxim of quality by telling wrong information about Will in order to keep her friendship and Christina so that she can focus on her thing to solve the problems in Chicago.

(4) 00:07:42,595 → 00:07:46,200 (I)

**Context:** Scene happens at the amity's base when Tris, the main character is together with Four, the main character's boyfriend. Four who is worried about Tris who looks sad asks Tris what she is thinking. Tris does not want to tell him and tells Four that she is okay.

Four: What's going on, Tris?

Tris: **Nothing. I'm fine.**

The violation of the maxim happens in the dialogue between Tris and Four when they are at amity's base. It is exactly after the war which happens in Chicago. All of the people are not safe and some of them are experiencing mentally unstable because they just lost their families and friends at the war. It is the same as Tris. She is experiencing a great trauma which causes her to have night mare whenever she sleeps yet she does not let anyone know about that. She understands that the condition is already complicated and she does not want to make it worse. Thus, when Four seems worried about her and asks what is going on, she chooses not to tell the truth. Here, the violation of the maxim is done because Tris wants to hide the truth in order not to make the condition worse than before.

### Violation of Maxim of Quantity

(5) 00:45:19,349 --> 00:45:23,326 (D)

**Context:** Scene happens in amity's farm where the dauntless is out for scouting. Tris, the main character is asking Four, one of the leaders of dauntless about what is in the outside of the fence. Four does not tell her, he only tells her that fence is built for a reason and she does not have to know why.

Tris: Do you know?

Four: **Let's just say they built their fence for a reason.**

In the conversation above, Four's answer is considered a violation of maxim of quantity because he does not give the complete information that Tris wants. In that conversation, it is clear that Four knows many things about something outside the wall, but he knows that it takes time for him to explain everything and thinks that not everyone deserves to know the complete information. Finally he chooses not to tell the complete one.

(6) 00:35:19,062 --> 00:35:27,327 (I)

**Context:** This scene happens when Tris, Caleb, and Four are going to go to Candor. Their intention is to find other dauntless members and make an army. Unfortunately, Caleb who is unsure decides not to come with them because of some reasons. Thus, he tells Tris that he is not coming which makes Tris confused.

Caleb: I'm not going with you guys.

Tris: What?

Caleb: **To Candor. I'm not going with you guys.**

Caleb's answer in the conversation above can be considered a violation because he does not explain what Tris wants. In that conversation, it is clear that Tris wants Caleb to repeat his statement in hope that he explains why he does not want to follow Tris, his only family that is left. Instead of explaining, Caleb tries to shorten the conversation by not telling Tris the whole information regarding his decision not to follow Tris and Four. For him, it is not important for Tris to know why he does not want to follow her and what his plan actually is.

### Violation of Maxim of Relevance

(7) 00:11:32,058 → 00:11:33,959 (D)

**Context:** This scene happens when Tris Prior finishes her aptitude test. The result makes Tori, the examiner, shocked. Surprisingly, Tris does not only belong to one faction but every faction suits her. They call her divergent but Tori, the one who does the test, seems like having a very bad memory of being a divergent because basically the government of the city thinks that divergent is like a threat. Thus, instead of telling her about the result which will cause a very fatal problem, she asked her to get out of that room.

Tris: But what was my result?

Tori: **Come on!**

This conversation shows that there is no cooperative principle used between Tris and Tori. Tori here fails to be cooperative by answering Tris's question with "come on" meanwhile Tris here asks about the result of her test. As an examiner, Tori should have told Tris honestly and directly about her test result. In fact, she seems to avoid answering Tris's question because she wants to hide something. The reason why she does not want to tell Tris what her test result is because Tris's result is different from the others. She belongs to every faction and it is not common there. The government calls them *divergent* and considers them a threat. Tori here who does not support the government and has a bad memory of divergent chooses to keep Tris safe by avoiding answering her question.

(8) 01:03:08,707 --> 01:03:14,746 (A)

**Context:** Segment happens at the fringe when Four, the main character's boyfriend is having mission to rescue people there. Four is surprised by the way officers operate on the field. Four asks Romit what they actually do there. Romit tells Four to his job and not to ask questions.

Four: What the hell is going on here?

Romit: **Just do your job, Dauntless.**

Four in this scene experiences violation of the maxim of relevance when he is at the fringe with other Bureau's armies. Basically what they are supposed to do at the fringe is save the children and bring them to the Bureau to get a better life. Unfortunately, the armies' way to save the children on the field does not meet Four's expectations. It is

more like kidnapping. Four who is shocked and confused asks Romit what they actually do there in an angry tone. Romit who does not want to tell the truth and keep the time chooses to violate Four's question by not answering it with "just do your job, Dauntless." In this case, it is clear that the speaker wants to avoid the question or to avoid telling the truth and he wants to save the time because basically the conversation is taken in an urgent situation.

### Violation of Maxim of Manner

(9) 01:29:45,144 --> 01:29:48,126 (A)

*Context:* Scene happens at director's office when Tris, the main character who is really angry because of David, the director is walking furiously towards the airship. David who seems upset asks Tris where she is going. Tris tells David that she is going to take his airship and heads to Chicago.

David: Where are you going?

Tris: **I'm taking your ship and I'm not coming back.**

Tris's answer here is considered a violation because she does not really answer David's question or in the other hand, she does not give the information briefly and clearly. She does that intentionally because Tris indeed wants David to accept what she is trying to say without questioning more. Tris here also lets David understand the surface meaning of what she says and leaves him with the ambiguity.

(10) 00:11:33,960 --> 00:11:39,166 (D)

*Context:* Here, the debate between Tris and Tori (the examiner) happens because Tris is really curious about the result meanwhile Tori does not want to tell her. As a result, when Tris asks for several times about the result, Tori suggests Tris tell a lie and hide the truth from Tris's parents. Thus, Tori ends the debate by forcing her out and sending her home.

Tris: What happened?

Tori: **You're going to tell your family that the serum made you sick and that I sent you home. All right?**

Based on the conversation above, it can be

assumed that both Tris and Tori do not seem to know each other well. They first meet when the conversation above happens in the room where Tris takes her aptitude test. Unfortunately, the test does not work well. Not until Tris finishes her test, Tori asks her to leave. Tori is shocked with the result of Tris's. That is why Tori is considered violating the maxim of manner by leaving Tris questioning because she does not explain why Tris should leave and lie to her family. In this case, Tori actually wants to save Tris by keeping her test result secret because she actually has a bad memory of that and does not want it to happen to Tris.

### The Functions of Maxim Violations

The functions of violations of conversational maxims here help to understand that there must be at least a reason why the speaker chooses to violate instead of following the cooperative principles when the speaker has a conversation. The author presents further explanation below. The explanation of the functions are separated based on the maxims.

#### *The Function of Quality Maxim Violations*

The function of violations of maxim of quality here is to keep the secret by telling wrong information so that the hearer assumes what is said by the speaker is the truth. That function is also found in the violation of maxim of quality done by the characters in the movie *Divergent Series*. The author finds eleven violations of maxim of quality in the movie *Divergent Series*. There are three violations whose function is keeping secret, as the speakers want to avoid protest and manipulate the hearers to follow what the speakers say without questioning anything.

There are six violations whose function is also keeping secret because they are afraid that it might lead them into big trouble once they tell the truth. They realize in that chaotic situation they should choose what they should and should not deliver. There are also two violations whose function is keeping secret because they do not want to worsen the situation by making people caring about the speakers worried. Thus, instead of telling what they should tell, they choose to tell the wrong information.

### ***The Function of Quantity Maxim Violations***

The function of violations of maxim of quantity is to hide complete information by telling less than what is expected by the hearer. The speakers do not tell the complete one because they do not want the hearer to get the full information they need.

In the movie *Divergent series*, the number of the violations is twenty-two. There are eleven violations whose function is to hide some important information because they actually want to make an important plan and know that not everyone deserves the information. That is why they do not want to share the whole information because they are worried when the hearer gets the information, they will ruin the speakers' plan. There are also eleven violations whose function is to hide the complete information because the speakers do not think that the hearer is worth telling and they want to save the time. Thus, instead of telling them the whole information that takes time and is not worth it, the speakers choose to tell them the incomplete one.

### ***The Function of Relation Maxim Violations***

The function of violations of maxim of relevance is to avoid unwanted questions by giving unrelated answers. The speakers tell unrelated answers because basically they have their own intention not to share the real answers. Thus, they divert the hearer to change the topic of the conversation.

In the movie *Divergent series*, the author finds forty-three violations of maxim of relevance. All of those violations have the same function as what is explain above. They do not want to answer the question with the answer that the hearer needs so they give an unrelated answer in order to make the topic change.

### ***The Function of Manner Maxim Violations***

The function of violations of maxim of manner is to confuse the hearer by not telling orderly, briefly, and clearly. The author finds twenty-four violations of maxim of manner in the movie *Divergent series*. From those twenty-four violations, it can be assumed that the function of those violations is indeed to confuse the hearer. The speakers intentionally do not want to tell straightforwardly. The speakers assume that what they talk about can answer the hearer's

questions so that they can end what matters in the conversation. The speakers also leave the hearers with ambiguity and do not want to explain more because they want the hearer to accept what the speakers explain without knowing deeper truth.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined violations of conversational maxim in *The Divergent series*. There are a total of 100 violations found in the movie series with the violation of the relevance maxim as the most frequent and the violation of the quality maxim as the least. This research finds that the characters in the series mostly violate the maxim of relevance. The speakers mostly violate conversational maxims because they want to deceive the hearers by letting them know the surface meaning only. Therefore, the violation of conversational maxims enables the speakers to answer unwanted questions without them knowing the real answers or the truth to avoid conflicts that usually come from saying the unwanted truth.

This research also finds several functions of the violation of conversational maxims uttered by the characters in the movie *Divergent series*. The author finds that the characters mostly violate the maxim of quality to keep the secret by telling the hearer wrong information so that they can protect it. The characters often lie because they also do not want to worsen the situation and make others worried about them. The next function of violating the maxim of quantity is to hide complete information by not giving too much information which is needed. The function of violating maxim of relevance is to avoid unwanted questions because basically the speaker does not want to share the answer to others. The last function of violating maxim of manner is to make the hearer confused so that in the end the hearer will not reach the truth which matters.

In conclusion, although Grice (1975) proposed the cooperative principle of maxims, people still tend to break the rules. It is very common and not only found in reality but also in the movie for instance in the movie of *Divergent series*, which the writer analyses. It is found that the people seen in the movies use the violation of the maxims to hide the



truth, give less information, and simply avoid unwanted questions. Without any exception, the speakers violate all of the maxims proposed by Grice (1975) which are maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner but those violations of conversational maxims which happen in the conversation will not be successfully accepted by the hearer if there is no clear context.

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