

## MAXIM FLOUTING IN “BROOKLYN NINE-NINE”

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### Abstract

This study aims at identifying the types of maxims flouted by the main characters of “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” and describing the context behind those floutings. The data were taken from the fourth season of “Brooklyn Nine-Nine”, an American police procedural comedy TV show. Documentation method was used to collect the data. Descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the data by applying Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975) and Cutting’s Theory of Context (2002). Based on the analysis, all types of conversational maxims were flouted, namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. Another finding in this research is that the context behind the floutings were needed to understand the meaning of the utterances.

**Keywords:** Context, Maxim Flouting, Pragmatics

### INTRODUCTION

Human beings interact with each other to fulfil their social needs. One of the many forms of human interaction is by communicating. They communicate verbally and nonverbally to share their thoughts and ideas. Communication between participants in a conversation occurs because they want to achieve something (Bunt, 2005). In order to communicate effectively and have a proper conversation, the participants of a conversation should follow certain norms on how a conversation work (Grice, 1989). A participant implicitly signals that they co-operate in a conversation by abiding the rules (Cruse, 2000). Cooperative principle, as proposed by Grice (1975) is a general principle which are expected to be observed by participants in a conversation. Grice categorized the sub principles into four, namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. However, it is very common for participants to not always obey the maxims due to certain reasons.

Participants who do not cooperate in a conversation could be described as violating or flouting the maxim. A participant of a conversation who violates the maxim, in some cases, intentionally mislead the hearer (Grice, 1989). Meanwhile, a participant who flouts a maxim appears not to follow the maxim and generates an implied meaning (Cutting, 2002).

Saragi (2016) explains that maxim flouting have four functions, including changing the subject of a conversation, giving information to avoid misunderstanding, providing sufficient explanation, and entertaining. The characters in a situation comedy flout the maxims with the expectation that the hearers are able to infer the implied meaning behind their utterances instead of misleading and deceiving (Amianna & Putranti, 2017). In addition, the occurrence of maxim flouting is in relation with the characters’ different personalities and communities (Ulfah & Afrilia, 2018). Furthermore, the implied meaning behind the maxim flouting depends on the context of the conversation (Wahyuni, et al., 2019)

The study of maxim flouting is in the field of pragmatics. Pragmatics concerns with the relation between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding; that is understanding the utterances which involves the meaning of the words uttered as well as the grammatical relations between them (Levinson, 1991).

This study is aimed to identify and analyze the types of maxims flouted by the main characters in Brooklyn Nine-Nine as well as describing the contexts behind the occurrence of the floutings. This study is expected to be a source of knowledge for other researchers who are interested in studying maxim flouting found in procedural comedy TV shows. Brooklyn Nine-Nine is suitable for this study because the characters are known to flout maxims during certain conversations, often times to generate laughter from the viewers because the show is a procedural comedy.

### **Cooperative Principle**

Cooperative principle is a set of conversational rules proposed by Grice (1975). Cooperative principle can be elaborated in four sub-principles called maxims, namely: quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice, 1989). The maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way (Levinson, 1997). Below is the explanation of those maxims:

1. Maxim of quantity requires the participants of a conversation to give the right amount of information. The maxim of quantity consist of two sub-maxims:
  - (i) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of exchange
  - (ii) do not make your contribution more informative than is required
2. Maxim of quality requires the participants to make a truthful contribution; that is by not saying what they believe to be false or which they lack adequate evidence. The maxim of quality consist of two sub-maxims:
  - (i) do not say what you believe to be false
  - (ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
3. Maxim of relation requires the participants to be relevant. The maxim of quantity consist of one sub-maxims:
  - (i) make your contribution relevant
4. Maxim of manner requires the participants to be perspicuous; that is by avoiding obscurity of expression, avoiding ambiguity, being brief as well as orderly. The maxim of quantity consist of four sub-maxims:
  - (i) avoid obscurity
  - (ii) avoid ambiguity
  - (iii) be brief
  - (iv) be orderly

### **Maxim Flouting**

Grice (1989) proposes that when a speaker blatantly fails to fulfil the maxim, he may 'flout' the maxim. According to Cutting (2002) when a speaker is 'flouting' the maxim, he assumes that the hearer is able to infer the implicit meaning behind his utterance. Cutting (2002) divides maxim flouting into four, based on each maxims. A speaker who flouts the maxim of quantity seems to fail in giving the right amount of information. A speaker who flouts the maxim of quality appears to use figurative language, such as hyperbole, metaphor, irony, and banter. A speaker who flouts the maxim of relation says something irrelevant and expects the hearer to make the connection between his utterances. A speaker who flouts the maxim of manner often appears to be obscure.

## Context

Context is used to analyze the parts of meaning that can be explained by the knowledge of the physical and social world, socio-psychological factors influencing the communication, and the knowledge of the time and place in which the words are uttered (Joan Cutting 2002; Peccei 1999; Yule 1996). According to Cutting (2002), ‘context outside text’ can be classified into three. Below is the classification of said context:

1. Situational context clarifies the situation of a conversation at the moment of speaking. Situational context can be identified when the participants in a conversation use demonstratives to elaborate their statements.
2. Background knowledge context clarifies general knowledge between participants as well as personal information between them. Background knowledge context which is in relation to general knowledge is known as cultural knowledge and personal information between participants is known as interpersonal knowledge.
3. Co-textual context clarifies the context of the text itself.

## METHOD

The data in this study was obtained from “Netflix”, which consist of the video recordings of “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” series and the scripts. Documentation method was applied in collecting the data. The form of data in this study are words and phrases, specifically taken from the conversations between the main and supporting characters of the show. Descriptive qualitative method was applied in analyzing this study. In the process of a qualitative research, the gist of the data are interpreted (Creswell, 2009). The data collected were classified and analyzed by applying Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975) to identify the data which falls into maxim flouting and the Theory of Context by Cutting (2002) was applied in analyzing the different types of context behind the occurrence of the floutings of those maxims.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The main discussions in this study are the maxim flouting in “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” season 4 and the context behind those floutings. The data will be presented first, consisting the context and dialogue of chosen scenes, followed by the analysis of the first problem and the second problem. All types of maxim were flouted in “Brooklyn Nine-Nine”. The total number of flouting was 32, however, this study only included 4 examples due to the similarities found in the result of the analysis.

### Discussion

#### a. Flouting of Maxim of Quantity

Jake and Holt, detectives of the New York City Police Department (NYPD), had been living in Florida for almost a year under the ‘witness protection program’ because they were wanted by a mafia boss named Jimmy Figgis. During their stay in Florida, they acquired new identities and kept their real ones as a secret because they were told to be undercover. As time goes by, they got tired of hiding. Therefore, Jake and Holt made a plan to secretly catch Figgis with the help of the Nine-Nine squad (other police officers from their precinct). In this scene, Jake was seen rolling on the ground as he was just got shot by his fellow co-worker, Detective Amy Santiago. Below is the dialogue between Jake and Amy:

Amy : Are you okay? I'm sorry I shot you. I thought that's what the nod meant.

Jake : **It was. It was awesome. It was actually just like the end of Speed, which is a pretty good movie. It's not as good as Die Hard. Die Hard's perfect.**

(*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* S4 E3/18:06-18:15)

Based on the dialogue, Jake was flouting the maxim of quantity. His opinion on how he was shot was not necessarily needed in the conversation because it was not a part of Amy's question. Due to that reason, Jake failed to obey the maxim of quantity, simply because according to Grice (1975), in order to obey the maxim of quantity, a speaker in a conversation should not make a contribution more than is required.

Based on the context of the dialogue above, Jake was telling Amy about what he thought of the way she shot him. In this scene, Jake was seen excitedly sharing his opinion about what he thought the incident was like. He claimed that it was like a movie called 'Speed'. He proceeded to say that it was not good as another movie called 'Die Hard'. Based on the description, the kind of context that can be analyzed was interpersonal knowledge context. According to Cutting (2008), interpersonal knowledge context can be understood when the participants of a conversation have shared or were familiar with the personal information of the thing that they were discussing during the conversation. In the previous episodes, Jake mentioned that he was a big fan of action movies, and his all-time favourite movie is 'Die Hard'. Therefore, it explains why Jake was comparing the incident to a scene from an action movie.

#### b. Flouting of Maxim of Quality

Jake and Holt had an incident at their workplace (the Fun Zone). They were hit by mini karts when they were having an argument in the middle of the circuit. One of the visitors happened to record their accident. Both Holt and Jake were afraid that she would upload the video on the internet, because if she did, Figgis would easily figure out where they were hiding. After a few research, Holt and Jake found some information about her and visited her house. In this scene, Jake and Holt were talking to the woman in front of her house. They politely asked her to delete the video, but she refused. Below is the dialogue between Holt and the woman:

Woman : I don't care about you. A great viral video like that could fetch me ten grand. And do you know what type of tanning bed I could get for that kind of money? A mid-range one.

Holt : **Not necessary. Your tan is great as-is. You look like an evenly-stained deck.**

(*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* S4 E1/15:45-16:11)

In the dialogue above, Holt was flouting the maxim of quality because he sarcastically complimented the woman. Her skin complexion was actually not even close to tan. According to Grice (1975), to obey the maxim of quality, one should not say what they believe to be false. Due to that reason, Holt failed to obey the maxim of quality, simply because he was not being truthful about the woman's appearance by 'complimenting' her.

Based on the context of the dialogue above, Holt and the woman who took a video of Jake and Holt at the Fun Zone were having a conversation about the reason why she did not want to delete the video which is to get easy money. In this scene, Holt was 'complimenting' the woman by saying that she did not have to get a tanning bed because he thought that her tan was already nice. Based on the description, the kind of context that could be analyzed in this dialogue was background knowledge context, specifically cultural knowledge. According to Cutting (2008), cultural knowledge context can be understood if the speakers share the same general information or knowledge about different areas of life. In the dialogue above, Holt exclaimed that the

woman looked like ‘an evenly stained deck’. In general, an evenly stained deck is painted dark brown, hence it explains why Holt compared it to the woman’s skin complexion.

### c. Flouting of Maxim of Relation

Jake and Holt went to a gun store to purchase some weapons and ammunitions. They needed the weapons to protect themselves while they were trying to take down Figgis (the mafia boss). Although both of them are detectives, they did not possess any weapons during their stay in Florida because they were not given their police badges, hence, they did not have the rights to carry a gun with them. Holt and Jake were not sure if they could purchase the weapons because they did not have any fake IDs, and if they were to show their real ones, they were afraid that the database would notice the ‘witness protection program’ that they were purchasing guns. Because of that, Holt prepared a bribe money in case the store owner would not let them purchase the weapons without any IDs. In this scene, Jake and Holt were seen inside a local gun store. The store owner told them that the federal database was down, therefore they did not have to show their IDs prior to their transaction. Below is the dialogue between Jake and the owner of the gun store:

Store owner : So how do you like your ammo? By the box or by the bucket?

Jake : **Cool, cool, cool, cool. Our country is broken.**

*(Brooklyn Nine-Nine S4 E2/05:02-05:08)*

Jake’s statement in the dialogue above was considered as flouting of maxim of relation. According to Grice (1975), in order to obey the maxim of relation, a speaker should be relevant. The reason why his statement was considered as a flouting of maxim of relation was because his response to the gun store owner’s question was not relevant. Based on the dialogue, the store owner was asking Jake whether he would like to store the ammunitions by the box or by the bucket, however, Jake did not answer the store owner’s question. Instead, he exclaimed ‘our country is broken’. It can be assumed that Jake was implying that the country’s law was broken because he was able to purchase a gun without having to go through a background check. He was caught off guard when he found out that the rule could easily be broken.

Based on the dialogue above, Jake and the gun store owner were discussing on how Jake would like to store the ammunitions that he was about to purchase. In this scene, Jake did not answer the store owner’s question the way he was supposed to. The store owner most likely thought that Jake’s answer would be either ‘bucket’ or ‘box’, however, Jake did not mention those things. As mentioned before, Jake was implying that he thought the country’s law was broken. The kind of context that can be analyzed in this dialogue is background knowledge context, specifically cultural knowledge. According to Cutting (2008), cultural knowledge can be understood by the speakers who have general knowledge regarding different areas of life. Jake was implying that the gun control law in the United States was broken after he found out that anyone could purchase a gun easily without having to go through a background check. Everyone who resided in the United States most likely know about this law, therefore, it can be concluded that Jake and the gun store owner shared the same background knowledge.

### d. Flouting of Maxim of Manner

Jake and Holt got into an argument due to a misunderstanding. The previous night, Holt blamed Jake for not being able to delete the video (of them being hit by mini karts). He went off and told Jake that he would not stay near him anymore. Little did he know, Jake actually swapped the woman’s phone (the one who took a video of them) with a fake one. Jake eventually told

Holt that he swapped the phone and handed it to him. The following day, Holt visited Jake at his new workplace named Dan's World of ATVs. He apologized and told Jake that he would like to work on the case (a secret operation to catch Figgis) alongside with Jake. After they made an agreement to work on the case together, Holt pretended that he was interested in doing a test drive on one of the ATVs because he did not want the other visitors to be suspicious of them. As Jake was trying to show Holt where the ignition of the ATV was, Holt cut him off. Below is the dialogue between Jake and Holt at the ATV dealer:

Holt : Can I take this for a test drive?

Jake : Yeah, sure. (clears throat) The ignition is here.

Holt : **I've ridden ATVs before—antiquing in the Berkshires.**

(*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* S4 E1/20:24-20:34)

In the dialogue above, Holt was flouting the maxim of manner. Holt's statement was considered as a flouting of maxim of manner because it was ambiguous. He was presumably implying that he did not need Jake's help on how to start the engine nor did he need any help on how to drive said vehicle. His succeeding utterance was also ambiguous because it did not make the proceeding utterance any clearer. According to Grice (1975), to obey the maxim of manner, one should avoid ambiguity. Therefore, it can be concluded that Holt was not obeying the maxim of manner because he was not being transparent.

Based on the dialogue and the previous explanation, Holt was implying that he did not need Jake's help because he knew how to ride ATVs. Because Holt's statement was ambiguous the kind of context that could be analyzed in this dialogue was background knowledge context, specifically interpersonal knowledge. According to Cutting (2008), the participants in a conversation could understand the interpersonal background context only if they have previously shared the same knowledge of the thing that they are currently talking about. In the dialogue above, Holt and Jake did not share the same background knowledge, hence, Holt's statement was ambiguous.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that all types of conversational maxims were flouted; namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. Moreover, the maxim flouting occurred because the speakers did not directly state what they had in mind. Therefore, they were generating some implied meanings in their statements. Additionally, it can be concluded that the context behind the floutings of conversational maxims were needed to understand the meaning of the utterances. By understanding the context in each data, the meaning behind the main characters' utterances as well as the reasons why the main characters flouted the maxims could be deduced.

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