Flouting Conversational Maxims In COVID -19 Pandemic Texts

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Abstract: Pragmatically speaking, to facilitate communication, speakers must adhere to the cooperative principle, which is comprised of four conversational maxims. They are the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of manner, and the maxim of relevance. Therefore, speakers must follow these maxims to establish an effective conversation free of misunderstandings. However, speakers occasionally flout the maxims to convey an underlying message, i.e., to generate an implicature. Thus, by breaking the maxims, the participants in a conversation are not considered uncooperative because maxim flouting is a technique for directing the listener's attention towards the speaker's implicit meaning. Therefore, this research aims to identify the conversational maxims flouted in texts discussing the COVID-19 pandemic as well as determining the types of conversational implicature arising from this flouting. Conversational implicatures included both particularized and generalized implicatures, including scalar and clausal implicatures. The study used Gices' (1975) and Levinson's (2000) models to analyze the texts.

1-Introduction:

Pragmatics is necessary if we need a more complete, deeper, and generally more rational description of human language behavior (Mey, 2001, p.12). According to Richard and Schmidt (2002, p.412), pragmatics is the study of language usage in communication, specifically the connection between sentences and the context and circumstances in which they are used. The most noticeable point is that pragmatics is mainly concerned with language in use as B. J. Birner proposed (2013, p.3) 'pragmatics may be roughly defined as the study of language use in context'. Pragmatics, therefore, is concerned with a quite elusive form of meaning, one that is not found in dictionary and might differ from one situation to the next (Birner ,2013, p.4). Thus, understanding the explicit and implicit meaning of others' speech in a conversation may be learned through pragmatics, and the pragmatic analysis is more concerned with the speaker's utterances than with the meaning of words or sentences.

In the communication process, Grice distinguishes between two levels of meaning: the first pertains to what is said, and the second refers to what is implicated. This difference paves the way for the fundamental aspect of implicature; communicated messages that are intended but are not expressed (Levinson, 1983, p. 102). In Grice's view, both "what is implicated" and "what is said" are components of speaker's meaning. 'What is said' refers to the aspect of meaning specified by truth-conditional semantics, whereas 'what is implicated' refers to the part of meaning that cannot be captured by truth conditions and hence belongs to pragmatics (Mey,2009, p.365). The first theory to describe how humans shrink the gap created by hidden messages was Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which incorporates

four conversational maxims that control human communication.

Cooperative Principle

One of the most fundamental assumptions that must be made in order for communication to be successful is that both participants in the conversation are cooperating. The strategy by which people attempt to make conversation occur is known as the 'cooperative principle' (henceforth CP). Grice (1975) emphasizes that implicatures in pragmatics are primarily connected to the general principle, which is the cooperation between speakers and listeners in a conversation. Paul Grice defines the CP as:

  "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."

Cruse (2000, p.355) describes the conversation as a prototypical conversation. Such an exchange does not consist of a random sequence of unconnected utterances made alternatively by participants but instead has a general objective or direction, and the contributions of the participants are intelligibly related to one another and the main aim of the conversation. Within this principle, there are four maxims, or sub-principles, that give more precise guidelines for conversational cooperation; those maxims are called "Conversational Maxims." According to Gricean theory, the conversational maxims (henceforth CMs) are four essential rules (maxims) that guide the effective and successful use of language. These maxims are maxim of quantity, quality, relevance, and the maxim of manner (Levinson, 1983, p.p.101-102).

2.1 Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity refers to the amount of information that must be communicated. Speakers are supposed to provide as much information as is required for their interlocutors to comprehend their utterances, but no more.

According to Grice (1975, p.45), it includes the following sub maxims:
1.   Make your contribution as informative as is required
2.   Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
Finegan (2008, p.287) provides the following example of asking a friend if she has a pet and getting the following response: ('+>' stands for implicates conversationally)

> **(1)** I have two cats.
>   +> 'I have two (and only two) cats (and no other pets).'

Because of the quantity maxim, the speaker in (**1**) understands how much information the listener requires so that she provides neither too little nor too much information. So we can say that, people who provide insufficient information risk their listener not being able to understand what they are saying because they are not clear enough. Those who provide more information than the listener needs, on the other hand, may bore them.

2.2 Maxim of Quality

Quality maxim focuses on making truthful participation. Speakers and writers are required to speak just what they feel to be true and to have proof to back up their claims. Grice (1975, p.46) asserts that:
1-Do not say what you believe to be false.
2-Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
It means that speakers need to be honest and say things that they feel are true. They are expected not to state anything they consider to be untrue or for which they do not have evidence. Levinson (1983, p.105) stated the following example in which implicature arises from the quality maxim:
 (**2**)   John has two PhD's
     +> I believe John has two PhD's, and have adequate evidence that he has.
What is stated explicitly lacks an expression of belief. On a surface level, the speaker does not appear to be adhering to the quality maxim. The listener, on the other hand, assumes the speaker is

speaking on a deeper plane. The implicature, which is an expression of belief, is triggered by this assumption.

2.3 Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner states that the speaker should make unambiguous not opaque utterances. Therefore, the speaker should be direct in his speech. Grice (1975, p.46) identified the "maxim of manner" by suggesting a "supermaxim" that just says "be perspicuous" includes a variety of maxims like:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

Manner maxim, according to Cutting (2002, p.35), is when the speaker conveys information briefly and orderly, the speaker must exclude unclear and confusing information from the hearer. In contrast to the others, the manner maxim is concerned with how something is said rather than what it is said (Bousfield, 2008, p.22) since the way in which an utterance is uttered can have a significant influence on how it is understood. Thus, in the following example:

   (3) His footsteps made the floor creak, and he coughed self-consciously.

      +>He coughed self-consciously after his footsteps made the floor creak.

The events mentioned are put into a chronological order. Because it is considered an ordered vision of the world, this utterance gives rise to the implicature "in that order" (Birner, 2013, p.61).

2.4 Maxim of Relation

In this maxim the speakers should offer something beneficial and pertinent. The following example illustrates the relevance maxim (Livenson,1983, p.107):

   (4) Pass the salt.

    +> Pass the salt now

Because of the relevance maxim, the listener deduces that the request is concerning the current

moment. As a result, the implicature is "pass the salt now".

According to Grundy (2000, p.74), the maxim of relevance is achieved when the speaker provides information that is relevant to the event. Furthermore, Finegan (2008, p.288) states that the maxim of relevance instructs speakers to structure their utterances in such a way that they are relevant to the current situation: "Be relevant at the time of the utterance". In other words, the maxim of relation indicates that the speaker should be relevant to the context of conversation.

3- Conversational implicature

People communicate meaning and intention in their speech because they must contact others in their social life; in other words, they engage in conversational interaction. They convey meaning, either explicitly or implicitly. Explicitly expressing meaning is stating the real conversation. While implicitly expressing meaning implies more hidden meaning in that conversation. In this case, indirect communication is known as 'conversational implicature.' Grice (1975) proposes that conversational implicature (henceforth CI) is a kind of implicature that may be understood and interpreted if and only if the participants in a given interaction may identify the speaker's meaning from the context of his or her words. Therefore, he stated that "conversational implicature is what has to be supposed in order to preserve the supposition that the Cooperative Principle is being observed." That is to say, CI is one of the most fundamental concepts in pragmatics, which investigates how language is used in the appropriate context. As a result, CI is suggested in conversation, i.e., something left implicit in real language usage (Mey, 2001, p.45). In the same vein, Black (2006, p. 25) says that CI is defined as the mix of language and context of a situation. An example of utterance involving conversational implicature:

(5) Carla: Are you going to Andy's party?

Fred: I have to work.

Fred's response implies that he will not be able to attend Andy's party since he has to work. However, he did not say that he would not attend Andy's party, and the words he said did not indicate that. What someone "implicates" is not explicitly conveyed to us but we must infer it from the information. We would normally infer from Fred's statement in **(5)** that he was not going. In this sense, CI is what is communicated/ conveyed/ understood without what is uttered. Therefore, it goes beyond what is said and occasionally contradicts it (Haung, 2017, p.156).

In a conversational exchange, both the speaker and the listener generally follow the co-operative principle and its component maxims, which consequently lead to the conversational implicature. It can also result from intentionally and blatantly flouting the maxims (Haung,1991, p.303). As expressed by Grice (1989, p26): Conversational implicatures come about by the exploitation (apparent flouting) or observation of the cooperative principle (CP) and a set of maxims (The former is the focus of this study).

4- Maxim Flouting

Maxim flouting is a type of non-observed cooperative principle (Grice, 1975, p.49). A flout happens whenever speakers consistently fail to obey a maxim without a desire to deceive or mislead. That is because he or she intends the listener to search for a meaning that is distinct from and sometimes in addition to the one expressed. It happens when participants abandon using the maxims to convince their listeners to deduce the underlying meaning behind their utterances; in other words, they use implicature (Levinson, 1983, p.104). In short, the basic requirements in maxim flouting fulfil the opposite role of maxim. Despite the fact that the speaker does not provide the correct information as required by maxims, the hearer is able to deduce the meaning due to the implicature. According to Brown and Yule (1983, p. 32),

flouting a maxim occurs when a speaker communicates an expression in addition to the literal meaning, which is the conversational implicature.

4.1Quantity Flouting

According to Cutting (2002, p. 36), flouting the quantity maxim occurs when the speaker intentionally supplies either more or less information than the context requires. In other words, the deliberate failure to satisfy the maxim of quantity in the cooperative principle is referred to as flouting the maxim of quantity. It involves whether the speakers are less informative than necessary or more informative than necessary. When speakers break the quantity maxim, they become less or more informative. Yule provided the following example between Charlene and Dexter (as cited by Sastra, 2015), in which Dexter flouting the maxim of quantity:

(6) Charlene: I hope you brought the bread and the cheese.

Dexter: Ah, I brought the bread.

In this conversation Dexter has broken the quantity maxim since he does not provide the necessary information. Dexter wants to inform Charlene that what is not spoken is not brought. He delivers too little information in response to Charlene's speech on purpose, so Charlene, as Dexter's hearer, is supposed to grasp the hidden meaning (Sastra, 2015). The following conversation is an example of being more informative in quantity maxim flouting:

(7) Rick: Who is the lecturer?

Tom: Mr. Budi, the best lecturer. You have joined his class several times.

In this conversation, the only essential information is the lecturer's name, yet Tom provides far too much detail. He goes above and beyond the required information, so flouting the quantity maxim. (Sastra, 2015).

4.2 Quality Flouting

According to Cutting (2002, p.37) when a speaker says something that does not accurately convey what he or she is thinking, he or she is said to be failing to fulfil the quality maxim; i.e. flouting the quality maxim, a maxim requiring the speaker to make a truthful contribution, that is, to refrain from saying what is considered untrue and to refrain from saying what the speaker lacks sufficient evidence to support. A speaker sometimes flouts the quality maxim by employing a metaphor, as shown in the example below:

(8) My house is a refrigerator in January.

In this example, the speaker explicitly says something that is untrue in order to convey a hidden meaning: his home is as chilly as a refrigerator (Sastra, 2015).

4.3 Manner Flouting

The speaker flouts the maxim of manner when his or her utterance seems ambiguous, fails to be brief and orderly, uses nebulous language. According to Cutting (2002, p.39), everyone who breaks the manner maxim may appear to be unclear. The following conversation is an example of flouting a manner maxim in which the speaker provides an ambiguous utterance:

(9) A-Where are you off to?

B- I was thinking of going out to get some of that white stuff for somebody.

> **A-** Ok, but don't be long – dinner's nearly ready.

B talks in an unclear manner by mentioning "white stuff" and "somebody" to avoid saying "ice cream and Michelle" so that this tiny child does not become overly excited and beg for ice cream before her dinner (Cutting, 2002, p. 39). Furthermore, the speaker may break this maxim in order to imply that the content of the conversation should not be shared with anyone else i.e. the speaker intends to withhold information from someone. For example, in the following conversation, two agents in a spy movie exchange information by using obscure expressions, so flouting the manner maxim (Birner, 2013, p.59):

(10) A: The crow flies at midnight.

B: The pomegranates are in aisle 16.

4.4 Relevance Flouting

Failing to follow the relevance maxim indicates that the speaker of a conversation is not speaking in a relevant manner. The relevance maxim is exploited by giving a comment or statement that is blatantly unrelated to the topic, for example, by suddenly shifting the subject or explicitly failing to address the other person's aim in asking a question (Ginarsih, 2014). Cutting (as cited by Sastra, 2015) provides the following exchange as an example of relevance maxim flouting:

(11) A: The phone is ringing.

B: I'm in the bath.

There is no clearly apparent relationship between **A**'s utterance and **B**'s response in this exchange. B has breached the relevance maxim by being irrelevant. A is supposed to be able to infer B's implicit message; that is, **A** is expected to pick up the phone while **B** is in the bath.

5-Types of Conversational Implicature

A conversational implicature is distinguished by the fact that it is context- dependent (Börjesson,2014, p.196). It implies that distinct implicatures may occur in various contexts (Birner, 2012, p.63). On the other hand, the extent to which the implicature corresponds to the form differs significantly. According to Kavetska (2020), this is what prompted Grice to classify implicature roughly into two categories based on the degree of connection to the context: Generalized conversational implicature (henceforth, GCI) and particularized conversational implicature (henceforth, PCI).

5.1 Generalized Conversational Implicature (GCI)

Grice (as cited by Mooney 2004, p. 902) clarifies GCI as follows: ''when one can say that the use of a certain form in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) carry such and such an implicature or type of implicature.'' That is to say, GCIs do not occur as a result of context-specific properties but are often carried out by mentioning a specific item. Additionally, when constructing a GCI, a speaker fails to be specific in the sense that he could be expected to be specific, leading to the assumption that he is unable to be specific. As a result, the GCI inference would obviously be drawn from the following utterance (Grice,1975, p. 56; 1989, p. 37):

(12) "I saw a woman in my office."

GCI: 'I saw someone other than my wife/girlfriend/mother/etc.'

Levinson's theory, termed "Generalized Quantity Implicatures," examines the implicature suggested by Grice's first quantity sub maxim, "Make your contribution as informative as is required". He considers two major sub-cases, based on Horn 1972 and Gazdar 1979: Scalar Quantity Implicature and Clausal Quantity Implicature (Haung, 2017, p. 50).

5.1.1 Scalar Implicature

Scalar implicature is a conversational implicature resulting from the application of the first quantity sub maxim (Meibauer & Steinbach, 2011, p.3). The idea is best described as follows: there is a scale that ranks its components from the weakest to the strongest, thereby generating alternative

sentences to a given statement (Cummins & Katsos, 2019, p.41). A lexical scale is made up of a group of linguistic alternatives, or contrastive words of the same grammatical category, that may be ordered in a linear way based on their degree of semantic strength (Levinson, 1983, p.133). This viewpoint was first expressed in Horn's work in 1972, and was later adopted by Levinson, so this scale is known as Horn's scale (Geurts, 2010, p.49), for example, on a scale of <all, some>, "some" is a less informative phrase than "all", and the negation of the stronger word can be derived from the assertion of the weaker one.

(13) Bonnie had some of the pears.

The speaker implies that "she didn't have all of them" (Geurts, 2009, p52).

5.1.2 Clausal Implicature

Clausal implicature resulting from the complex sentence that contains the main clause as well as embedded or sub clause (Marsuki & Muliyono, 2017). Levinson (2000, p.109) presents the example below to demonstrate how clausal implicature is generated:

(14) "Sue is a linguist or an anthropologist."

+> 'For all the speaker knows, Sue is perhaps a linguist, or perhaps not a linguist, perhaps an anthropologist, or perhaps not an anthropologist

Gazdar (as cited by Levinson, 1983, p.137) constructs the stronger and weaker forms in the following manner to detect the clausal implicature:

(a) stronger form	(b) weaker form	(c) implicature of (b)
'p and q	'p or q'	[Pp, P ~ p, Pq, P ~ q]
'since p, q'	'if p then q'	[Pp, P ~ p, Pq, P ~ q]
'a knows p'	'a believes p'	[Pp, P ~ p]
'a realized p'	'a thought p'	[Pp, P ~ p]

| 'a revealed p' | 'a said p' | [Pp, P ~ p] |
| 'necessarily p' | 'possibly p' | [Pp, P ~ p] |

The majority of propositional attitude verbs (except know and realise) and most verbs of saying (except disclose, divulge, admit) belong to the class of relevant verbs that give rise to clausal implicatures (Gazdar, 1979, p. 61).

As Mey (2009, p.) points out, the most important fact to notice about clausal implicatures is that they convey "epistemic uncertainty about the truth of the embedded sentence."

5.2 Particularized Conversational Implicature (PCI)

Grice (1989, p.37) describes PCI as follows "cases in which an implicature is carried by saying that p on a particular occasion in virtue of special features of the context, cases in which there is no room for the idea that an implicature of this sort is normally carried by saying that p." It means that PCIs are generated from a specific context rather than simply from the use of particular words. The following exchange provides an example for a PCI:

(15) **A:** Where's John?

      B: The light in his study is on.

      +> John is in his study.

B provides an irrelevant answer to the question raised by **A**, which demands a definite location for John, consequently flouting the maxim of relevant. The listener deduces that "John is in his study" based on the shared background knowledge of **A** and **B** and the context of the utterance. Such inferences are of the PCI type (Kavetska, 2020).

6- Data Analysis

This section will examine and analyze four texts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These texts

were gathered from a variety of websites. The analytical procedure is divided into two stages. The first stage involves determining the type of maxim being flouted under Grice's model (1975). Second, analyze the sort of implicature conveyed due to this flouting under Grice's (1975) and Levinson's (2000) models.

Text 1

Sen. Cassidy: "What percent of CDC employees are vaccinated?"

CDC Director: "We're actively encouraging vaccination in all of our employees and doing a lot of education and outreach in order to get our agency fully vaccinated."

Senator Cassidy from the Republican Party questions Rochelle Walensky, an American physician-scientist who is the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at the Congressional Hearing (Senate Hearing) to obtain information on how many employees at the CDC have been vaccinated against COVID. The Congressional Hearing was held in 5 Nov. 2021.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3pN6x5Ayes

A-Maxim Flouting

According to the Gricean model, in this question-response exchange, the speaker (Sen. Cassidy) asks a direct, explicit question to the director of the CDC about the number of vaccinated employees in her agency that, in return, requires a direct and clear answer: "What percent of CDC employees are vaccinated?" The CDC director chooses to flout the maxim of manner by being indirect in her answer. Put it another way, instead of giving the exact percent, she talks about their policy to activate employees to get vaccination

"We're actively encouraging vaccination in all of our employees and doing a lot of education and outreach in order to get our agency fully vaccinated." Her indirect answer is seen as a flouting to the maxim of manner because she seems obscure and not brief. This flouting of maxim generates the conversational implicature "I don't have the percent now."

B-Type of Implicature

According to the model, the conversational implicature "I don't have the percent now" in the text above is seen as a particularized one because it cannot be generated in all occasions. The text is understood in such a way only under these medical conditions, that is, Dr. Walensky is the head of the CDC, which means that she knows all kinds of information about the people who work for the CDC, including how many employees have got the vaccine.

Text 2

Sen. Kennedy: "But I don't want to get too off …. off the question here if I walk over to the house of representatives do I have to wear a mask?"

CDC Director: "Those are locally driven policies but we felt that it was important for the science to… for us to convey the science of what is safe for individuals."

The aforementioned conversation takes place during a Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing on 19 May 2021, Sen. John N. Kennedy (Republican-Los Angeles) asked CDC Director Rochelle Walensky to explicitly define what the regulations on mask-wearing are in the United States.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X91Rw40BLe0

A-Maxim Flouting

According to the Gricean model, the text above is seen as a flouting to quantity maxim. Dr.

Walensky provides much more information than required in her response to Sen. Kennedy's inquiry "if I walk over to the house of representatives do I have to wear a mask?", which merely demands a 'Yes' or 'No' answer. Sen. Kennedy wants to know whether the protocols require wearing a mask if a person walks to the House of Representatives but Dr. Walensky chooses to give more information than is required to generate an implicature. The generated implicature is "we should wear a mask."

B- Type of Implicature

According to the model, the implicature above "we should wear a mask" is a particularized one because it cannot be generated in all and every occasion. It is categorized as a particularized for this occasion.

Text 3

Journalist: "You said many times that the US is doing far better than any other country when it comes to testing; why does that matter? why is this a global competition to you if every day Americans are still losing their lives and we're still seeing more cases every day?"

Trump: "Well, they're losing their lives everywhere in the world and maybe that's a question you should ask China don't ask me ask China that question okay when you ask them that question you may get a very unusual answer."

Weijia Jiang, a reporter for CBS who is Asian-American, asked US President Donald Trump about his emphasis on the fact that the United States is performing better than any other country when it comes to testing COVID-19. The conversation occurred during a press conference at Monday's Rose Garden event at the White House about Coronavirus testing on 12 May 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zBCeS7wf7w

A-Maxim Flouting

In this conversation, Trump's response seems to be flouting the relevance maxim. The reporter wonders why Trump sees testing as a race while thousands of Americans die from COVID-19. Instead of responding with a clear justification, Trump chooses to change the subject by addressing the reporter to ask China that question in his attempt to accuse China for this disaster. Trump intentionally gives an irrelevant answer to generate an implicature that is "China is completely responsible for this disaster, as well as for the deaths of thousands of Americans."

B-Type of Implicature

This conversation is highly context-dependent and requires specialized knowledge, which makes it as a PCI. The question upset the US President since it was a direct critique of his attitude to the Corona pandemic from an Asian-American journalist who appeared to be from China. Consequently, the implicit meaning of Trump's response can only be grasped if the context is understood.

Text 4

Sen. Paul: "Let's read from the NIH can I? gain a function, this is your definition that you guys wrote it says that: scientific research that increases the transmissibility among animals is gain of function they took animal viruses that only occur in animals and they increase their transmissibility to humans how you can say that is not gain a function? <u>It's a dance and you're dancing around this</u> because you're trying to obscure responsibility for four million people dying around the world from a pandemic."

Rand Paul, a Republican senator from Kentucky, got into a heated exchange with Dr. Anthony Fauci, White House chief medical advisor and director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, during a Senate Hearing on 20 Jul 2021 about whether the NIH funded research in Wuhan labs that Sen. Paul claims could have led to the Covid-19 pandemic. Fauci

had refuted in prior Senate testimony that the NIH had directly supported the study.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pnb2Yxri6eY

A-Maxim Flouting

Sen. Paul decides to disobey the quality maxim in his speech by employing a metaphor. The sentence "It's a dance, and you're dancing around this" is a sort of figurative language in which the speaker implies more than what is said. In this case, there is no real dancing or any bodily movement at all. Instead, it means to avoid saying the truth directly or to escape the truth via lying, or to "dance around the truth". As a result, the speaker blatantly breaches the maxim in order to lead the listener to deduce the underlying message, which is "you are lying about the type of research."

B-Type of Implicature

In this exchange, the implicature is highly dependent on the context. The speaker is a politician who continually repeats his charge against Dr. Fauci. On the other hand, the listener represents a scientific authority who has already denied these claims in many previous Senate Hearings. Thus, the implicature is a PCI since the inference demands a particular knowledge and the conversation occurs in a specific situation.

Conclusions

It is necessary to examine the Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature to analyze and differentiate between what individuals say and what they imply when communicating. This study has presented a pragmatic analysis for COVID19 texts   and demonstrated that the theory of conversational implicature applies to this sort of text. According to the data presented above, all of the maxims are flouted by the COVID- 19 pandemic speakers.

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