

# VIOLATIONS OF CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS IN THE MOVIE SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE FINAL PROBLEM

Josep H. Pukoliwutang, Deane J. Wowor, Aloysius Rettob  
English Language and Literature Study Program  
Faculty of Language and Art  
Manado State University  
Tondano, Indonesia  
E-mail address: [pukoliwutangjosep@gmail.com](mailto:pukoliwutangjosep@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This research aims at finding the type of maxims that violate from all the conversations that happen in this movie and describing how the character violates the maxims in the movie *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem*. The researchers use the qualitative method in this research. The researchers take the data from the movie script and also the movie itself. The researchers analyze the data using qualitative data analysis by Donald Ary. The findings of this research show that violations of maxims do occur in this movie. The characters from this movie violate all types of conversational maxims, overall there are 30 violations of the maxims that occur in this movie. The characters of this movie violate the maxims by flouting, opting in, and opting out the utterances.

**Keywords:** Violations of Conversational Maxims, Cooperative Principle, Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem

## INTRODUCTION

In daily life, people can not avoid communicating with others. Communication is an important way to deliver information and gives specific purposes. According to Kamagi, Wowor, Oroh, and Rantung that language has a function as a tool of communication used by human to express their thoughts, feelings, desires, and action” (2018:847) and also Sudarsono, Samola, and Maru state that human do need language to communicate to each other (2016:7), and according to Maru, Tulus, Dukut, Liando, Mangare, and Mamentu language acts as a medium for social interaction (2018; 895). People who can not communicate well

must be hard to interact with each other. Commonly people communicate to express their idea or opinion and make up their relationships among society. Without language, people would find problems in sharing information, interacting with others, showing sympathies, and clarifying important cases (Liando, N.V.F, and Lumettu, R. 2017:21). Based on Maru, M.Gidion, Ratu, D.Matheos; Dukut, Ekawati Marhaenny “...the mastery of language expressions deter-mines the share thinking, the critical thinking process gives the value for the language expression” (2018:386-390). Communication shall be taking more than one person to make a good conversation, there are the speaker and the hearer. Communication is

successful when the speaker and the hearer are able to avoid misunderstanding in conversations. In a conversation, people often express the utterances directly or indirectly, the speaker can deliver their utterances directly and the hearer can express the response correctly, but sometimes people do not only give the information directly but also indirectly. Whereas, a good conversation must be clear to make the hearer easy to understand.

The cooperative principle is introduced by H.P Grice, as stated by Grundy "Grice argued that speakers intend to be cooperative when they talk. One way of being cooperative for the speaker is to give as much information as expected (Grice H.P 1975:73)". The speaker wishes the conversation is good, relevant, and clear but naturally, people sometimes give unpredictable responses. "The cooperative principle is a common rule to portray the participants how they cooperate in conversation to gain efficient interaction (Levinson 1983: 101)". It shows that cooperative principles have rules that shall obey by the speaker and the hearer. The rules of cooperative principles are called "*Conversational Maxims*".

The conversational maxim is divide into four types: the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relevance, and the maxim of manner. Those maxims are important in daily conversation to avoid misunderstanding. Cutting (2002: 40) emphasizes that Grice stated "when the speaker does not obey the maxims, the speaker violates the maxim. There are some possibilities that people may break the rule of the maxim: first, the speaker needs to give additional information to make the hearer understand, second, the speaker wants to give humor in

their utterances and third, the speaker hides something behind the conversation".

The violations of maxim can be found in drama, talk-show, and even our daily life, but at this point, the researchers only focus on the violations of the four types of maxims which are "*Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Relevance, And Maxim of Manner*" in the movie *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem*. The researchers choose the movie since many conversations happen in the movie.

*Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem* is the last episode from the fourth season of Sherlock Holmes. This movie is an adaptation of the novel Sherlock Holmes by Sir. Arthur Conan Doyle. The main character is Sherlock Holmes itself, referring to himself as a "consulting detective" in the stories, Holmes is known for his proficiency with observation, forensic science, and logical reasoning that borders on the fantastic, which he employs when investigating cases for a wide variety of clients, including *Scotland Yard*. There are also some supporting characters such as Dr. John Watson, Mycroft Holmes, Eurus Holmes, and James Moriarty".

It is a detective movie whereas the movie shows some maxim violations in some conversations and dialogues. In this study, the researchers use conversations and dialogues of all characters to analyze if there are violations of the maxim.

There is an example for the violations of the maxim which appear: "*(Sherlock Holmes. Directed by Benjamin Caron) a little girl woke up on a plane where all the passengers and pilots slept except for the girl, she panicked and tried to wake everyone up, and when she tried to*

wake them up, a cellphone rang that there was an incoming call. She was looking for the cellphone so she could ask for help, and when she picked up the call, she then said *LITTLE GIRL (On the phone): Help me, please. I'm on a plane and everyone's asleep. Help me!*  
*JAMES MORIARTY (The Caller): Hello. My name's Jim Moriarty. Welcome ... to the final problem."*

The examples above show the violation in *Maxim of relevance* because James Moriarty's answer does not relate to what The Girl is asking for, instead of helping The Girl, he introduces himself and says something random to The Girl. Therefore, this research title is *Violations of Conversational Maxims in The Movie Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem*.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researchers use qualitative research approach. "The study of qualitative is primarily to describe a situation, phenomenon, problem, or event" (Kumar, 2011: 11). "Qualitative data are usually in the form of words rather than numbers" (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 1). Therefore because of some characteristics so the researchers decide to use qualitative approach; First, the data of this study is in the form of words or conversations in the movie script that consist of violations of maxims. Second, this study uses human instruments: the researchers themselves as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis.

The qualitative inquirer deals with data that are in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers and statistics. "Data in the form of quotes from documents, field notes, and interviews or excerpts from videotapes, audiotapes, or electronic communications are used to present the findings of the study". (Donald Ary, 2010: 424)

## DATA COLLECTION

The primary source of this research is the conversations of all characters that contain violations of maxims in it from the movie script. This study conducts through several systematic steps of collecting the data. At first, the researchers read the whole script of the movie for a better understanding of the context and situation that happen where the conversation takes place. Afterward, the researchers identify and select chunks of conversations that are utter by all characters which violate conversational maxims only. Finally, the researchers systematically classify and arrange the data to be easier to analyze.

## DATA ANALYSIS

"Data analysis is a process whereby researchers systematically search and arrange the data in order to increase their understanding of the data and to

enable them to present what they learned to others” (Donald Ary, 2002:465).

The researchers use three steps of Qualitative data analysis by Donald Ary in his book entitled *Introduction to Research in Education*, and those are (1) organizing and familiarizing, (2) coding and reducing, and (3) interpreting.

### 1. Organizing and Familiarizing

“The first stage in analyzing qualitative data involves familiarization and organization so that the data can be easily retrieved. Initially, the researcher should become familiar with the data through reading and rereading notes and transcripts, viewing and reviewing videotapes, and listening repeatedly to audiotapes. The major task of organizing the large body of information begins after familiarization. Start with creating a complete list of data sources.”

### 2. Coding and Reducing

“This is the core of qualitative analysis and includes the identification of categories and themes and their refinement. Coding is about developing concepts from the raw data. The most common approach is to read and reread all the data and sort them by looking for units of meaning—words, phrases, sentences, and subjects’ ways of thinking. After all the data are coded, the researcher places all units having the same coding together.”

### 3. Interpreting

“Interpretation is about bringing out the meaning, telling the story, providing an explanation, and developing plausible explanations. Interpreting qualitative data is difficult because there

are no set rules to follow. The quality of the interpretation depends on the background, perspective, knowledge, and theoretical orientation of the researcher.”

## FINDINGS

This chapter aims to answer the research questions which are about what type of conversational maxims that violate in this movie and how does the character from this movie violates the maxims in the movie *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem* by using the steps of analyzing qualitative data by Donald Ary.

## ORGANIZING & FAMILIARIZING

The main purpose of this step is to make the researchers familiar with the data by reading the script and watch the movie to gain a better understanding of the situation and context where the violations of maxims happen.

The researchers watch the movie and read the movie script several times which make the data easier to identify and organize into a smaller group. In this step, the researchers also make a large group contain with raw data which are bunches of conversations that the researchers pick from the movie script that afterward proceed to the second step. Overall there are 30 violations of maxims that occur in this movie which include *Maxim of Quality*, *Maxim of Quantity*, *Maxim of Relevance*, and *Maxim of Manner*.

## CODING & REDUCING

In this step, the data from the first step is put in a group base on the type of maxim that the conversations break. The

researchers analyze and start to put the raw data from a larger group before into some tables with the name of each maxim on top of it to make the data easier to organize into some smaller groups before starting to write it in this paper.

### ***Maxim of Quality***

- “Eurus : Oh! Have you had sex?”
- “Sherlock : (continuing to play the violin) Why do you ask?”
- “Eurus : The music. *I’ve had sex*”

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- “Eurus : ‘Cause I could make you laugh. I loved it when you laughed. Once I made you laugh all night. I thought you were going to burst. (*Sherlock smiles very slightly*) Then mummy and daddy had to stop me, of course.”
  - “Sherlock : Why?”
  - “Eurus : Well, turns out I got it wrong. Apparently, you were screaming.”

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- “Sherlock : Redbeard was my dog. I know what happened to redbear.”
  - “Eurus : Oh, Sherlock, you know nothing. Touch the glass, and I’ll tell you the truth.”

### ***Maxim of Quantity***

- “Mycroft : You’re just leaving?”
  - “Sherlock : Well, we’re not staying here. Eurus is coming and, uh, *someone’s* disabled all your security.”
- 
- “Mycroft : Doctor Watson. Why would he do that to me? That was insane”

- “John : Uh, yes. Well, *someone* convinced him that you wouldn’t tell the truth unless you were actually wetting yourself.”
- “Mycroft : Someone?”
- “John : Probably me.”

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- “John : How can that be Moriarty?”
  - “Eurus : Oh, he recorded lots of little messages for me before he died. Loved it. Did you know his brother was a station master? I think he was always jealous.”

### ***Maxim of Relevance***

- “Girl : (*anxiously, tearfully*) Help me, please. I’m on a plane and everyone’s asleep. Help me!”
- “Moriarty : Hello. My name’s Jim Moriarty. Welcome ... to the final problem.”

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- “Mycroft : Sherlock? Help me!”
  - “Sherlock : Experiment complete. Conclusion: I have a sister”
  - “Mycroft : This was you? all of this was you?”
  - “Sherlock : Conclusion two: my sister – Eurus, apparently – has been incarcerated from an early age in a secure institution controlled by my brother... oh, hey bro!”
  - “Mycroft : Why would you do this ... this pantomime? Why?”
  - “Sherlock : Conclusion three: you are terrified of her!”

### ***Maxim of Manner***

- “John : You might wanna close that that window. (*He looks at Mycroft.*) There is an East Wind coming.”
- 

- “John : What is it?”
  - “Sherlock : It’s a drone”
  - “John : Yeah, I can see that. What’s it carrying?”
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- “Sherlock : Why the headphones?”
  - “Guard : She doesn’t stop playing, sometimes for weeks.”
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### ***Conversations That Violate More Than One Maxim***

- “Sherlock : How did you manage to get out of this place? How did you do that?”
- “Eurus : Easy. Look at me.”
- “Sherlock : I am looking at you.”
- “Eurus : You can’t see it, can you? you try and try but you just can’t see; you can’t look.”
- “Sherlock : See what?”
- “Eurus : (*she holds out the violin towards him*) What do you think?”
- “Sherlock : Beautiful.”
- “Eurus : You’re not looking at it.”
- “Sherlock : I meant your playing.”
- “Eurus : Oh, the music. I never know if it’s beautiful or not; only if it’s right.”
- “Sherlock : Often they’re the same thing. I need to know how you escaped.”
- “Eurus : Look at the violin.”
- “Sherlock : It’s a Stradivarius”
- “Eurus : It’s a gift”
- “Sherlock : Who from?”
- “Eurus : Me.”

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- “John : (*to Mycroft*) So did she have it too?”
  - “Mycroft : Have what?”
  - “John : The deduction thing.”
  - “Mycroft : (*sarcastically*) The deduction thing?”
  - “John : ... Yes.”
  - “Mycroft : More than you know.”
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### **INTERPRETING**

In this step, the researchers start to interpret the data that already put in groups with context whether it’s written context from the script or the expressions of the characters in this movie.

#### ***Maxim of Quality***

1.

- “Eurus : Oh! Have you had sex?”
- “Sherlock : (continuing to play the violin) Why do you ask?”
- “Eurus : The music. *I’ve had sex*”

The conversation above breaks one of the rules of the maxim of quality which is “*Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence*”, precisely when Eurus asks Sherlock about “*have Sherlock had sex*” just by listening to the music that Sherlock plays.

2.

- “Eurus : ‘Cause I could make you laugh. I loved it when you laughed. Once I made you laugh all night. I thought you were going to burst. (*Sherlock smiles very slightly*) then mummy and daddy had to stop me, of course.”
- “Sherlock : Why?”

- “Eurus : Well, turns out I got it wrong. Apparently, you were screaming.”

In this conversation, Eurus violates the maxim of quality because she tells a lie to Sherlock about what she did that made Sherlock laugh all night, but the truth is he actually didn't laugh, but instead scream. This means Eurus violates one rule in the maxim of quality which is “*Do not say what you believe to be false*”.

3.

- “Sherlock : Redbeard was my dog. I know what happened to Redbeard.”
- “Eurus : Oh, Sherlock, you know nothing. Touch the glass, and I'll tell you the truth.”

The conversation between Sherlock and his sister Eurus above shows a violation of the maxim of quality that happens because Sherlock violates one of the rules of the maxim “*Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence*” by saying that Redbeard is his dog but he doesn't remember exactly about who or what Redbeard really is.

### **Maxim of Quantity**

1.

- “Mycroft : You're just leaving?”
- “Sherlock : Well, we're not staying here. Eurus is coming and, uh, *someone's* disabled all your security”

The conversation between Mycroft Holmes and his brother above violates the maxim of quantity because Sherlock does not give a clear answer to Mycroft, the violation happens when Sherlock says that “*someone's disabled all your security*” to

Mycroft, in fact, Sherlock is the one who designs the trap to make Mycroft tells the truth about their sister, it means he knows about who disable the security but instead telling the truth, he chooses to make it not too obvious by saying “*someone*”. This means he breaks a rule from the maxim of quantity, “*make your contribution as informative as required*”.

2.

- “Mycroft : Doctor Watson. Why would he do that to me? That was insane”
- “John : Uh, yes. Well, *someone* convinced him that you wouldn't tell the truth unless you were actually wetting yourself.”
- “Mycroft : Someone?”
- “John : Probably me.”

The violation from the conversation above happens when John tries to hide the fact about who convinces Sherlock to make a plan to scare Mycroft so he will tell the truth by saying that *someone convinced sherlock* instead of saying it directly about who is the one that convinces Sherlock to do so, therefore, John violates one rule of the maxim which is “*make your contribution as informative as required*”.

3.

- “John : How can that be Moriarty?”
- “Eurus : Oh, he recorded lots of little messages for me before he died. Loved it. Did you know his brother was a station master? I think he was always jealous.”

In this conversation, Eurus Holmes breaks one rule of the maxim of quantity which is “do not make your contribution more informative than is required”, by saying something that unnecessary about Moriarty’s brother.

**Maxim of Relevance**

1.
  - “Girl : (anxiously, tearfully) Help me, please. I’m on a plane and everyone’s asleep. Help me!”
  - “Moriarty : Hello. My name’s Jim Moriarty. Welcome ... to the final problem.”

The violation happens when the answer from Moriarty does not relate to what the Girl is asking for, instead of helping the Girl, he introduces himself and says something random to the Girl.

2.
  - “Mycroft : Sherlock? Help me!”
  - “Sherlock : Experiment complete. Conclusion: I have a sister”
  - “Mycroft : This was you? all of this was you?”
  - “Sherlock : Conclusion two: my sister – Eurus, apparently – has been incarcerated from an early age in a secure institution controlled by my brother... oh, hey bro!”
  - “Mycroft : Why would you do this ... this pantomime? Why?”
  - “Sherlock : Conclusion three: you are terrified of her!”

In this conversation, Sherlock violates the maxim of relevance by ignoring what Mycroft asks him and keep telling about the conclusion that he make to Mycroft.

3.

- “John : You okay?”
- “Sherlock : I said I’d bring her home. I can’t, can I?”

The conversation between John and Sherlock above violates the maxim of relevance simply because Sherlock does not answer the question base on what John asks but instead telling John about his failure that he doesn't succeed in bringing Eurus back home.

**Maxim of Manner**

1.
  - “John : You might wanna close that that window. (He looks at Mycroft.) There is an East Wind coming.”

John’s dialogue violates one rule of the maxim of manner which is “Avoid ambiguity”, the meaning of his utterance “East wind” can be a real east wind or maybe Mycroft's sister named Eurus (God of east wind in Greek mythology).

2.
  - “Mycroft : Memories can resurface; wounds can re-open. The roads we walk have demons beneath... (he turns his gaze to Sherlock) ... and yours have been waiting for a very long time. I never bullied you. I used – at discrete intervals – potential trigger words to update myself as to your mental condition. I was looking after you.”

Violation of the maxim that occurs in this dialogue simply because of the utterances given by Mycroft is too convolute because the whole point of his



answer is only "*I was looking after you*". By doing that, he breaks one rule of the maxim of manner "*be brief*".

3.

- “Governor : What would you give to get her back? I mean, if you could, if it was possible? What would you do to save her?... Eurus will kill me. Please save my wife.”

The Governor violates the maxim because he adds unnecessary things in his dialogue, the whole point of his dialogue is only begging for John to save his wife.

### ***Conversations That Violated More Than One Maxim***

1.

- “Sherlock : How did you manage to get out of this place? How did you do that?”
- “Eurus : Easy. Look at me.”
- “Sherlock : I am looking at you.”
- “Eurus : You can’t see it, can you? you try and try but you just can’t see; you can’t look.”
- “Sherlock : See what?”
- “Eurus : (*she holds out the violin towards him*) What do you think?”
- “Sherlock : Beautiful.”
- “Eurus : You’re not looking at it.”
- “Sherlock : I meant your playing.”
- “Eurus : Oh, the music. I never know if it’s beautiful or not; only if it’s right.”
- “Sherlock : Often they’re the same thing. I need to know how you escaped.”
- “Eurus : Look at the violin.”

- “Sherlock : It’s a Stradivarius”
- “Eurus : It’s a gift”
- “Sherlock : Who from?”
- “Eurus : Me.”

In the conversation between Sherlock and Eurus Holmes above occur some violations of maxims, the violations happen when Sherlock asks Eurus about how can she escapes from that prison for the first time and she just answers him with "*easy, look at me*", the answer that she gives is too short and can't explain the situation at that time, which means she does not *being informative as required* therefore she violates the maxim of quantity. The second violation happens when Sherlock asks her for the second time about how can she escapes and she gives an irrelevant answer for the current exchange, instead of telling the truth, she asks Sherlock to look at the violin, with that, she violates the maxim of relevance.

2.

- “John : (*to Mycroft*) So did she have it too?”
- “Mycroft : Have what?”
- “John : The deduction thing.”
- “Mycroft : (*sarcastically*) “The deduction thing”?”
- “John : ... Yes.”
- “Mycroft : More than you know.”

The first violation happens when John suddenly asks Mycroft about the third Holmes, he asks if Eurus has the ability of deduction too like both of his brothers have, but instead of telling the point of his question he replaces the word "*deduction*" with "*it*" which make Mycroft confuse at that time, therefore, John violates the rules of the maxim of manner, "*avoid ambiguity*" and "*be brief*". The second

violation occurs when Mycroft repeats John's question just to mock him, by doing that Mycroft violates the maxim by flouting it, he breaks a rule from the maxim of quantity which is "make your contribution as informative as required".

## CONCLUSION

The researchers conclude that there are violations of maxims that happen in this movie whether the violation happens because the character from this movie tries to flouting it, opting in, or opting out the

utterances. The researchers find out that this movie contains violations of the four maxims which are the maxim of quality that occurs seven times in the conversations from this movie, the maxim of quantity that occurs three times in this movie, the maxim of relevance that happens four times in this movie, the maxim of manner that occurs the most from the conversations in this movie with total fourteen violations, and the researchers also find out that there are conversations that violate more than one maxim in this movie which occur two times.

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