

**The Gricean Cooperative Principle:  
Flouting And Hedging In The Conversations In Joseph Conrad's  
*The Secret Agent***

**M.G. Sri Ningsih**

**Abstract,** *The Cooperative Principle (CP) proposed by Grice states that a speaker should be cooperative by making the conversational contribution as required. In CP Grice proposes four conversational maxims : Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Speakers sometimes flout the conversational maxims, so do characters in The Secret Agent. The flouting and hedging the conversational maxims can be done through figures of speech.*

**Key words:** *the Gricean Cooperative Principle, flouting and hedging, figures of speech, conversations, The Secret Agent.*

There are a number of researchers who have conducted studies on pragmatics. Some of them investigated flouting and hedging in novels, dramas, and students' writing. Referring to those reseraches, the researcher is interested to conduct a study on the flouting and hedging in the conversations in one of Joseph Conrad's novels: *The Secret Agent*.

Grice proposes a theory called the Cooperative Principle. This theory tells speakers to be cooperative by making the conversational contribution as required in the talk exchange. Within this theory, he proposes four maxims which speakers should abide: (1) Maxim of Quantity, which tells speakers to make the contribution as informative as required and not more informative than is required; (2) Maxim of Quality, which tells speakers to make the contribution one that is true: not to say what they believe to be false or that for which they lack evidence; (3) Maxim of Relation, which tells speakers to be relevant; and (4) Maxim of Manner, which tells speakers to be perspicuous: to avoid obscurity of expression, to avoid ambiguity, to be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), and to be orderly (Grundy, 2000: 74-75). In real life, speakers often do not abide those conversational maxims; in other words, speakers often violate the maxims. The violation to the four conversational maxims is often done through euphemism, synonyms, or figures of speech. An example of using euphemism is as follows: *He has passed away* instead of saying *He has died*. Sometimes speakers also use synonyms to violate the maxims, for example: *He has a little money* instead of

saying *He is poor*. Besides, speakers also often use figures of speech to violate the conversational maxims such as in the following example: *My heart sank*.

This research is focused on the flouting and hedging the conversational maxims that are done by the characters in the conversations in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Flouting the conversational maxims analyzed in this research is based on the use of six figures of speech mentioned in Grundy (2000): *irony*, *metaphor*, *overstatement*, *rhetorical question*, *tautology*, and *understatement*.

Abrams (2005: 142) writes that *irony* is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. Further, he defines *metaphor* as a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison (Abrams, 2005: 102). Hornby (2010) defines *overstatement* as an exaggerated statement; *rhetorical question* as a question asked for the sake of effect, to impress people, no answer is being needed or expected; *tautology* as needless repetition, that is, the saying of the same thing again without making one's meaning clearer or more forceful; and *understatement* as a statement that expresses an idea, etc., too weakly.

This research is conducted to describe: (1) kinds of conversational maxims flouted and/or hedged in the conversations in the novel; (2) the distribution of the flouting and hedging; and (3) the speakers' possible reasons for flouting/hedging the maxims.

The findings of this research are expected to give more evidence in support of the theory that speakers do not always abide the Gricean Cooperative Principle. Speakers often violate Grice's theory of conversational maxims by using figures of speech, and their reasons are possibly for politeness or to give emphasis on what they say. Politeness Principles proposed by Leech (1983) are often put together with the Cooperative Principle. It is also expected that by studying the speakers' possible reasons for flouting and hedging the Gricean Cooperative Principle, readers, especially students of English literature, will be able to know why the Gricean Cooperative Principle is not applied in conversations containing figures of speech, and how the four conversational maxims are flouted and/or hedged. It is also expected that students of English literature will give more

appreciation to Conrad's works as Joseph Conrad was one of the great English novelists, and the students will become more proficient in understanding the intended meaning of an utterance.

This study is a pragmatic study conducted by using descriptive analysis. The scope of this study is to describe the six kinds of figurative language used in the conversations in the novel as a representation of flouting and hedging.

### **THE RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a qualitative research using descriptive analysis. The data are taken from the conversations in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. The conversations taken from the novel are conversations which contain six kinds of figurative language: *irony*, *metaphor*, *overstatement*, *rhetorical question*, *tautology*, and *understatement*.

As this research is a qualitative research, the main instrument is the researcher himself/herself (Latief, 1999). It is also in line with Bogdan and Biklen (1998) that mention about it. The researcher functions as the data collector and data analyst. The researcher uses some supporting instruments to collect the data: notes in the form of a matrix which is used to classify and analyze the flouting and hedging in the conversations in the novel. Besides, for the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the data, some experts are also involved to verify the data.

The steps of the data collections are as follows: (1) Conversations containing the six figures of speech (irony, metaphor, overstatement, rhetorical question, tautology, and understatement) are listed. An example of conversations containing figurative language is as follows:

*"My heart went down into my boots," Mr. Verloc, aware of the sensation raised his head bravely. (p. 29)*

Conversations that do not contain the six figures of speech are discarded.

The data analysis follows some steps. First, the conversations listed from the novel are marked according to the kinds of figurative language. Then, they are analyzed whether they flout the maxim of Quantity, Quality, Relation, or Manner, and/or hedge the maxims. The last step is to find out the possible reasons of the

speakers for flouting and/or hedging the maxims; and to find out the possible reasons is done by studying the context in which the conversation is uttered.

Since the researcher is the main/key instrument in this study, her subjectivity can bias the findings of this research so that triangulation needs to be done in the data analysis. The purpose of verifying the data is to check the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the data. Lincon and Guban (1985) in Choyimah (2004) introduce four kinds of triangulation: *data triangulation*, *investigator triangulation*, *theory triangulation*, and *method triangulation*. The four kinds of triangulation suggest the use of multiple and different *sources*, *investigators*, *theories*, and *methods*. This study applies the investigator triangulation as a technique of checking the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the data by cross-checking with two experts who are two colleagues of Graduate Program of State University of Malang.

#### **THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The researcher found 46 conversations in the novel that contain figures of speech and hedging. Five kinds of figurative language out of the six mentioned in Grundy (2000) are found in the conversations. They are: irony, metaphor, overstatement, rhetorical question, and tautology; but there is no understatement that is used in the conversations. Three conversational maxims are flouted by the figures of speech: maxim of Quantity, maxim of Quality, and maxim of Manner; but there is no flouting the maxim of Relation. The following tables show the distribution and frequency of the figures of speech and the flouting.

Table 1: Figures of Speech Flouting the Conversational Maxims

<b>No.</b>	<b>Figures of Speech</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1.	Irony	1	2.33%
2.	Metaphor	36	83.72%
3.	Overstatement	2	4.65%
4.	Rhetorical Question	2	4.65%
5.	Tautology	2	4.65%
6.	Understatement	0	0%
	Total	43	100%

Table 1 shows that there are five kinds of figurative language flouting the conversational maxims: 1 irony (2.33%), 36 metaphors (83.72%), 2 overstatements (4.65%), 2 rhetorical questions (4.65%), and 2 tautologies (4.65%). There is no

occurrence of understatement (0%) in the conversations. Those five kinds of figures of speech flout three conversational maxims.

Table 2: Distribution of Flouting the Conversational Maxims

No.	Figure of Speech	Flouting the Maxim of				Total
		Quantity	Quality	Relation	Manner	
1.	Irony	-	1	-	1	2
2.	Metaphor	3	24	-	30	57
3.	Overstatement	-	2	-	2	4
4.	Rhetorical Question	-	2	-	-	2
5.	Tautology	2	-	-	2	4
6.	Understatement	-	-	-	-	0
	Total	5	29	-	35	69
	Percentage	7.24%	42.03%	0%	50.73%	100%

Table 2 shows that there are 5 figures of speech flouting the maxim of Quantity, 29 figures of speech flouting the maxim of Quality, and 35 figures of speech flouting the maxim of Manner; but there is no figure of speech flouting the maxim of Relation.

As shown in Table 2, there are 3 metaphors and 2 tautologies flouting the maxim of Quantity, while there is no irony, overstatement, rhetorical question, or understatement flouting the maxim. The total number of figures of speech flouting this maxim is 5 (7.24%). Some examples of figurative language flouting the maxim of Quantity are as follows:

(1) *You shall be chucked.* (p.28)

(2) *Don't you think that, if I had not been the optimist I am...* (pp.43-44)

Example (1) is said by Mr. Vladimir, First Secretary of the Embassy who employs Mr. Verloc, to Mr. Verloc. Vladimir uses the sentence when he is angry to Verloc because of Verloc's uselessness. The expression *You shall be chucked* is used metaphorically. When someone is chucked, he/she cannot breathe; therefore he/she can die. So the sentence is meant to say that if Verloc is lazy, he will not be paid by the Embassy. Consequently Verloc will not be able to afford his living. This metaphor flouts the maxim of Quantity as it does not give adequate information in the talk exchange, and it also flouts the maxim of Manner as the meaning is obscure. The speaker's possible reason for flouting the maxim is to give emphasis on his dislike to Verloc's laziness. While example (2) uses a

needless repetition. It is said by Michaelis, one of Verloc's anarchist friends. This tautology flouts the maxim of Quantity as it gives information more than is required; it also flouts the maxim of Manner for its prolixity. The speaker's possible reason for flouting the maxim is to give emphasis that he is an optimist.

For the maxim of Quality, there are 1 irony, 24 metaphors, 2 overstatements, and 2 rhetorical questions which flout it; while there is no tautology or understatement flouting this maxim. The total number of flouting this maxim is 29 (42.03%). Some examples of figures of speech flouting this maxim are:

(3) *What they want just now is a jolly good scare. (p.29)*

(4) *I suppose the cup of horrors was full enough for such as me (p.298)*

In sentence (3) the expression *a jolly good scare* is an irony since *jolly good* has a direct opposite meaning to *scare*. The irony flouts the maxim of Quality since it says something which is false; it also flouts the maxim of Manner for its obscurity. The speaker's possible reason for flouting the maxim is to give emphasis on the plan that he thinks as scaring for other people but satisfying for the anarchists group. While example (4) is a metaphor containing a comparison between two things, i.e., *the cup of horrors* and *all the terrible things that had happened to Mrs. Verloc (the speaker)*. The metaphor flouts the maxim of Quality as it is false, and at the same time it flouts the maxim of Manner for its obscurity. The speaker's possible reason to flout the maxim is to emphasize that all things that had just happened made her depressed and she could not bear it.

The researcher finds out that there is no figure of speech flouting the maxim of Relation. This might be caused by the seriousness of the speakers, who are political people, so that they always connect up with the context when speaking.

As for the maxim of Manner, there are 1 irony, 30 metaphors, 2 over-statements, and 2 tautologies which flout the maxim, while there is no irony or understatement flouting the maxim. The total number of flouting the maxim of Manner is 35 (50.73%). Some examples of flouting the maxim of Manner are as follows:

(5) *Oh, that's a failing which age does not cure. (p.21)*

(6) *They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people – nothing else. (p.51)*

Sentence (5), which is a metaphor, contains an expression *which age does not cure*. This expression uses a comparison between *age* and *someone who can cure somebody*. It flouts the maxim of Manner for its obscurity. The speaker's possible reason for flouting the maxim is to give emphasis that *time will not improve anything*; and it is also done for politeness by avoiding saying straightforward utterance. Sentence (6), which is an overstatement, flouts the maxim of Manner for its obscurity. The speaker's possible reason for flouting the maxim is to give emphasis on the attitude of the government officials to the people.

An example of hedging that is used in the novel is as follows:

(7) *What we want is to administer a tonic to the Conference in Milan.*  
(p.29)

Sentence (7) is said by Vladimir to Verloc when they are talking about their plan to bomb a certain place. The expression *What we want* is a hedging. By using the hedging, the speaker wants to insist Verloc, and he does not want to listen to any objection from the addressee.

There are two possible reasons of the speakers for flouting the conversational maxims: one is for politeness, and the other is to give emphasis on what they say. Sometimes speakers flout the conversational maxims for politeness since it is considered impolite to say straightforward utterance.

An example of flouting for politeness is as follows :

*My heart went down into my boots* (p.29).

The sentence is said by Mr. Verloc to Mr. Vladimir (First Secretary of the Embassy who employs Verloc). Verloc avoids saying straightforward utterance when he does not like to hear what Vladimir has said to him, and this is done for politeness.

Another possible reason for flouting is to give emphasis on what is said, for example:

*He would go through fire for you* (p.184)

which is said by Mrs. Verloc about Stevie's (Mrs. Verloc's brother) obedience to Mr. Verloc.

In the 69 examples of flouting done by the speakers, 52 examples are done to give emphasis, 11 for politeness, and 2 examples are both for politeness and to give emphasis.

Speakers in the novel sometimes hedge the maxims. Six examples of hedging are found, and those examples are done by people who like to force their ideas to others, for instance, Mr. Vladimir.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Based on the findings, the researcher found five kinds of figurative language out of six mentioned in Grundy (2000). The occurrence of the five figures of speech can be ranked as follows: 36 metaphors (83.72%), 2 overstatements (4.65%), 2 rhetorical questions (4.65%), 2 tautologies (4.65%), and 1 irony (2.33%). Metaphor dominates the occurrence (83.72%). This figure of speech is the most frequently used because of its comparison between two disparate things which makes it the simplest and most widespread figure of speech. While the conversational maxims flouted in the conversations can be ranked from the highest to the lowest: maxim of Manner (50.73%), maxim of Quality (42.03%), and maxim of Quantity (7.24%). Maxim of Manner is the most frequently flouted due to the obscurity of expression of the figures of speech. Then, it is followed by flouting the maxim of Quality since most of the figures of speech (which are most in the form of metaphor) say something which is false. Maxim of Quantity is rarely flouted (7.24%); it is flouted 2 times by tautologies which give information more than is required, and 3 times by metaphors which give inadequate information needed. The maxim of Relation is never flouted in the conversation. Sperber & Wilson (1995) say that to be relevant in a context, an assumption must connect up with the context in some way. The speakers in the novel do not go out of the context, or they connect up with the context in the conversations. This might be caused by their seriousness as political people who are difficult political situation during the time of the story.

There are two possible reasons of the speakers for flouting the maxims. First, they flout the conversational maxims for politeness, that is, they try to avoid offending others by saying straightforward utterances. The second possible reason is to give emphasis on what they say. In the political situation told in the story, it

seems that people need to give emphasis on what they say, that is, to make other people sure of what they say. Sometimes the speakers give emphasis in their utterance because they are more superior than the hearer, for example, when Vladimir talks to Verloc.

As for hedging, which means to avoid being fully committed in the substance of the utterance, it is often done by some certain characters: Vladimir, the Assistant Commissioner, and Chief Inspector Heat. It seems that hedging used in the conversations in the novel shows that characters' personality who like to force their ideas to others, and do not want to listen to others' opinions.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the findings of the research we can conclude that there are five kinds of figurative language that flout three conversational maxims in the conversations. The kinds of figurative are metaphor, overstatement, rhetorical question, tautology, and irony. The three conversational maxims which are flouted are maxim of Manner, maxim of Quality, and maxim of Quantity. Metaphor is the dominating figure of speech used in the novel. This is due to the use of comparison between two disparate things which makes metaphor the simplest and most widespread figure of speech. The maxim of Manner is the most frequently flouted since figures of speech cannot be translated literally as they have implicit meaning. Thus, the meanings of the figures of speech are mostly obscure; therefore, they flout the maxim of Manner for their obscurity. The maxim of Quality is the second frequently flouted because most of the figures of speech are metaphors, and metaphors are literally false. Hence, they flout the maxim of Quality. Maxim of Quantity is rarely flouted; this means that most speakers in the novel give their information as required. Maxim of Relation is never flouted due to the seriousness of the speakers as political people who are aware of the situation; consequently, their speaking is always related to the topic. The speakers' possible reasons for flouting and/or hedging the maxims are for politeness or to give emphasis.

After learning from the figurative language which flout the conversational maxims in the novel, it is suggested to English language learners to read literary works such as novels, short stories, or dramas which often use figurative language

in the conversations in order to study pragmatics, especially flouting the conversational maxims. It is also suggested to further researchers who are interested in pragmatics to conduct researches about flouting maxims in other literary works such as dramas.

**REFERENCES:**

- Abrams, M.H. 2005. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Eighth Edition. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Bogdan, C.R. and Biklen, S.K. 1998. *Qualitative Research for Education*. Third Edition. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.
- Choyimah, N. 2004. *Politeness and Topic Movement in Casual Conversation*. Thesis. Unpublished. Malang: State University of Malang.
- Conrad, J. 1907. *The Secret Agent*. London: J.M.Dent & Sons, Ltd.
- Grundy, P. 2000. *Doing Pragmatics*. Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hornby, A.S. 2010. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Latief, M.A. 1999. *Penelitian Kuantitatif dan Kualitatif*. Edisi Th. 11, No.2, Malang: Forum Penelitian Kependidikan Lembaga Penelitian Negeri Malang.
- Leech, G.N. 1983. *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman Group, Ltd.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. 1998. *Relevance*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher, Ltd.