Gricean Maxims in the TV Series
*The Office*

An analysis of the character Dwight regarding failure to observe Gricean maxims

Grices samtalsmaximer i TV-serien *The Office*

En analys av karaktären Dwight i relation till att misslyckas observera Grices samtalsmaximer

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to analyze the rule breaking of Gricean conversational Maxims and how it is used in the TV series The Office. The character Dwight has been in focus, and the main goal of this study is to find out if and how he violates the Gricean Maxims in conversations. The study is based on written transcripts from four episodes of this TV series. The character Dwight's conversations from these episodes have been analyzed in order to see how one or more of the four conversational maxims (quantity, quality, manner and relation) were dealt with. The maxim that Dwight turned out to break the most was the maxim of relation. Dwight is a character that contributes to this series by repeatedly breaking the conversational maxims.

Keywords:
humor, The Office, Grice's maxims, conversational maxims, violation of maxims.

Sammanfattning på svenska
Syftet med denna studie är att analysera överträdelser av Grices samtalsmaximer och hur de används in tv-serien The Office. Karaktären Dwight är i fokus och målet med studien är att ta reda på om och hur han bryter mot Grices samtalsmaximer. Studien baseras på fyra transkriberade avsnitt från denna tv-serie. Dwights konversationer i dessa fyra olika avsnitt har analyserats för att se hur en eller flera av konversationsmaximerna (kvantitet, kvalitet, uppförande och relation) har behandlats. Den maxim som Dwight visade sig bryta mot mest var relationsmaximen. Dwight är en karaktär som bidrar till denna humorserie genom att frekvent bryta mot samtalsmaximerna.

Nyckelord:
humor, The Office, Grices maximer, Grices samtalsmaximer, överträdelse av maximer.
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1. Introduction

In conversation there are a few rules that the speaker is expected to observe in order to be seen as cooperative. When a speaker fails to observe these rules of conversation it can confuse the hearer. The rules that are supposed to be followed in conversations are known as Grice's conversational maxims (Grice, 1975:45). These maxims are foundations in conversation, and illustrate what is important when conversing successfully with other people. In this following example person A asks person B if their friend's new boyfriend is a nice person, and person B responds, by failing to observe these rules. Person A- “Is he nice?” Person B- “She seems to like him”. Instead of just answering yes or no to this question, person B gives a more informative and vague answer (Thomas, 1995:66). By doing this person B fails to observe one of the maxims, namely the maxim of quantity, which is to not say too much, or to little.

*The Office* is a TV series with many interesting characters that are often involved in peculiar conversations. The conversations in this TV series are often interrupted by lies and irrelevant input, which can make conversations appear humorous. The different characters in this series all have their conversational flaws, and many of them fail to cooperate in different conversations, by for example lying and being irrelevant. The character Dwight often appears in peculiar conversations where he often makes people feel awkward. This is the reason for studying Dwight and his different conversations. The aim with the present study is to analyze how and how often the character Dwight violates the conversational maxims.

Based on the section above I have narrowed my study down into the following research questions:

- How often does Dwight fail to observe Grice’s conversational maxims?
- Does Dwight fail to observe all the maxims to the same extent?

These research questions will be answered by studying four different episodes from the TV series. In these episodes Dwight's conversations will be analyzed in order to find out if it is possible to see patterns regarding Dwight's failures of observing conversational maxims.
2. Background

2.1 The cooperative principle

Grice’s cooperative principle (Birner, 2013:41-42) states that people involved in a conversation above all else will try to cooperate with their interlocutors. In cooperative discourse people have some common aim, for example that they want to solve a dispute or find a solution to a problem. Moreover, according to the cooperative principle, people should continuously make appropriate utterances in order to keep discussions moving forward. In a discourse where the interlocutors are not getting along and start arguing with each other, people might think that they are uncooperative, but by discussing and handling an argument the interlocutors are in fact being cooperative. In an argument people often stick to the topic at hand, making utterances that can be interpreted, and they also try to complete their thoughts without giving irrelevant details that will confuse the person they are discussing with. These are all criteria for a cooperative conversation (Birner, 2013:42). Furthermore, both parties in a discussion should continue discussing in appropriate style in order to finish the conversation, and not just terminate the discussion when they disagree unless they both agree on terminating the discussion (Grice, 1975:45).

Conversation will work only when both interlocutors are making appropriate utterances (Grice, 1975:45). A person who does not make appropriate utterances would be seen as utterly uncooperative. It would be almost impossible to have a successful argument with a person who is uncooperative in a conversation because they would not contribute to the conversation with appropriate input. Only when people believe that the person they are discussing with is trying to be cooperative they will be able to interpret and understand the other person’s utterances. According to the cooperative principle, people are expected to behave in a certain way in order to be considered cooperative. In 1975, Grice broke down the cooperative principle into four maxims, which a person involved in a discussion, would be expected to follow in order to contribute to a conversation. These four maxims were the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of manner, and lastly the maxim of relation (Grice, 1989:28).

When engaging in a conversation the speaker should contribute by talking in a manner that fulfills the purpose of a conversation (Huang, 2007:25). Grice did not express the cooperative principle in order to tell people how they should behave in conversation, but rather an observation of regularities in conversation between people. When people enter a discussion they often make the assumption that some set of rules are supposed to be followed by both participants in a conversation. For example, when driving people make the assumption that the other drivers will operate under the same regulations as themselves. When people fail to observe
these regulations, both in conversation and in traffic, accidents can occur. The four conversational maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relation help us to navigate within the cooperative principle (Thomas, 1995:62-63). These maxims will be discussed further in section 2.3.

2.2 Implicature and inference

The term implicature is the definition of what is implied by the speaker when they make an utterance (Grice, 1975:43-44). It denotes the implied meaning from the speaker to the hearer without any certainty that the hearer understands the implicature. In some cases the conventional meaning of words determine the implicature made by a speaker. However, this is not always the case, for example if the speaker has an underlying message beyond what they say. Implicature is a conveyed meaning that the speaker has, so it is not only what is literally being said, but there can also be another meaning behind the message (Huang, 2007:25-26). For example if a person says that there is nothing to do in Karlstad, he/she does not mean that there is literally nothing at all to do in the city, but rather that he/she feels that Karlstad is a boring city, and the speaker expects the hearer to understand this implicated meaning. The speaker generates implicature, and the hearer may or may not understand the implication that the speaker tries to convey (Paltridge, 2012:50-51).

There are three different types of conversational implicature: conventional, particularized conversational implicatures and scalar implicature (Paltridge, 2012:51-52). In conventional implicature no specific context is needed in order for the hearer to understand the implicature of the speaker. Moreover, in conventional implicature the speaker can also use words like “but”, “well” and “yet” in order to implicate that they will make an utterance that the hearer will not expect or hope to hear. In particularized conversational implicature the implicature of the speaker will be interpreted by the context rather than the words spoken in a conversation. For example, if a person says that he needs coffee and the response he gets is that there is a shop nearby, and then the response relates to the situation when talking about coffee, so in this case the hearer can understand that the speaker refers to a coffee shop. The third kind of implicature is scalar implicature, which derives from a situation where a person expresses values on some sort of scale. In other words, in scalar implicature the speaker can use any value on a scale and then the hearer is expected to figure out the implied value on the scale that the speaker used. An example could be someone who says that they are partly responsible for a mistake and the hearer is expected to interpret exactly how much responsibility the speaker has had in the mistake (Paltridge, 2012:52).

When talking about the hearer’s point of view, the term inference refers to what the hearer in discourse interprets and understands when hearing an utterance being made by the speaker (Birner, 2013:43). In some cases, what the speaker implicates will not be fully understood by the
hearer. Consequently, while the speaker generates implicature, inference is the implications that a hearer makes when listening to an utterance. What the speaker tries to say may not be how the hearer receives their message or how they interpret the speaker's conveyed message. In other words, Implicature is the implied meaning from the words of the speaker, and inference is the inferred interpretation of the hearer (Thomas, 1995). For example, if a speaker says that there is nothing to do in his/her hometown, but they actually just mean that it is a boring town, and the hearer interprets things as if there is absolutely nothing to do in that town, they are inferring that meaning from the speaker's utterance (Birner, 2013:43).

2.3 Gricean Maxims

Grice's conversational maxims are four different rules that people are expected to follow in a conversation (Grice, 1975:45).

The first maxim, the maxim of quantity, is about providing the necessary information in conversations. This maxim has two sub-maxims, which provide information explaining the rules of the maxim (Grice, 1989:28). The first sub-maxim tells us to contribute to a conversation by being as informative as possible for the purpose of the exchange. The second sub-maxim tells us that we should not contribute to a conversation with more information than is actually needed to get our points across (Grice, 1975:45). The maxim of quantity can be complex, since when for example a person utters the phrase “Most of the people in this room believe in God” when actually all people in the room believe in God, they would still be telling the truth. However, when the speaker says “most”, people believe that the speaker does not mean all people, which means that the speaker is not being informative enough. So, if the speaker knows that all the people in the room believe in God then they should say exactly that without any other additions in order to be as informative as possible without saying too much (Birner, 2013:44).

The maxim of quality states in its two sub-maxims that we should not say what we believe to be false to our conversation partner and that we should not make utterances that we lack adequate evidence for (Grice, 1975:46). This maxim can be paraphrased as “say what is true”, but since it is not possible to be certain of all truths, the best a speaker can do is to say only what they believe to be the truth and avoid saying things they believe are false.

The maxim of manner tells speakers to be clear and to avoid obscurity when speaking. This maxim has four sub-maxims that tell the speakers that they should avoid obscure expressions when speaking, and also to avoid ambiguity in conversation. Furthermore, the maxim of manner states that speakers should be brief, and lastly to be orderly when discussing with other people and that they should try to avoid unnecessary prolonging of utterances (Grice, 1975:46). In order to avoid obscurity in expressions, speakers should formulate themselves by using clear expressions and avoiding hard-to-understand verbiage, so as not to be misinterpreted. In order to
avoid ambiguity a speaker has to avoid making unclear utterances. In order to be brief and orderly speakers should avoid prolonging their utterances and make sure they are structured in their way of speaking (Birner, 2013:58).

*The maxim of relation* has only one sub-maxim, which is stating that we should always try to be relevant when participating in a conversation (Grice, 1975:46). The word relation in this maxim refers to the relation between an utterance and the whole context. For example if a speaker talks about coffee and then suddenly says that Pluto is a planet, then he/she is failing to observe the maxim of relation by not sticking to what is relevant in a conversation. However, if two people are having a discussion and one person interrupts the other by saying they have something on their face, then they have not failed to observe the maxim of relation; they have only uttered a statement that is relevant to this situational context. The maxim of relation is fulfilled when an utterance can be interpreted by the hearer as contributing towards the goal of the conversation in question.

### 2.4 Observing Maxims

When a person in a conversation listens to their interlocutor they have to ask themselves whether the person they are discussing with is being cooperative in the discussion. Only then that person will be able to encode and understand the speaker's probable intention with his/her utterance. According to Grice (1975:49) there are four ways in which interlocutors can behave with respect to the cooperative principle. When a person speaks in a discussion they can observe a maxim, violate a maxim, flout on a maxim or opt out on a maxim (Birner, 2013:42-43).

To *observe* a maxim is to obey it fully (Birner, 2013:43). In order to observe all four maxims, as discussed in section 2.3, this means that a speaker should make informative utterances, and not say too much or too little when speaking. In addition, they should only say what they have evidence for and believe to be true. Moreover, they should only make utterances that are relevant to the discussion with their interlocutor. Lastly a speaker should also try to be brief, clear, and avoid being ambiguous in order for the other person to understand what they are saying (Grice, 1975:45-46). In following example, all maxims are being observed. Person A- “Where are my car keys?” Person B- “They are on the table in the hall”. This is an example where person B tells the truth, and at the same time being relevant, and not saying too much, nor too little (Thomas, 1995:64).

When maxims are *violated*, the speaker fails to observe them, in other words does not follow one or more of the maxims in the cooperative principle (Birner, 2013:43). Moreover, in violations of maxims the speaker is trying to get away with failing to observe one or more of the maxims without making it clear to the hearer. Violations of maxims are often a way to mislead or deceive the other participant in a discussion. When a person tells a person a lie in a discussion, they are
violating the maxim of quality that tells us that we should never say what we believe is to be false. Violating a maxim could be if the speaker is intentionally lying to the hearer. The following is an where person A is cheating on person B with a woman. Person A- “Is there another man?” Person B- “No there is no other man”. The speaker would then be violating the maxim of quality by trying to deceive the hearer that person A is in fact not cheating on person B (Thomas, 2013:43).

Flouting a maxim is a way of not observing a maxim (Birner, 2013:43). However, when a speaker flouts a maxim they fail to observe rules that are very clear to the hearer, which means that the hearer is often aware of the violations. For example, if a person talks about relationships and says that love is a battlefield then the speaker does not mean that love is literally a battlefield. In this case the speaker makes such a clear failure of observing the maxim of quality that it should be obvious that they are not speaking the literal truth. When someone hears a speaker flouting a maxim and they are aware that the speaker is for example flouting the maxim of quality, then that person will still believe that the speaker is trying to be cooperative. Moreover the hearer might understand that the speaker fails to observe this maxim because they are trying to use the metaphor of love as a battlefield in order to express their thoughts on love (Birner, 2013:43). When a speaker flouts a maxim, the hearer recognizes that the speaker is uttering a blatantly untrue statement, so that they know that the hearer is not trying to deceive (Thomas, 1995:67).

To opt out of a maxim is to refuse to acknowledge the rules of the cooperative principle all together (Birner, 2013:43). When a person is asked a question or invited to a discussion and they start doing something completely different such as opening a newspaper or their computer, then that person has opted out. Opting out is basically when a person in a discussion refuses to contribute to a discussion by staying quiet. An example of opting out could be when a police officer refuses to release the name of a victim to protect the victim’s family by staying quiet (Thomas, 1995:75).

These are example where speakers are expected to observe the maxims, but fail to do so anyway. However, there are circumstances where people are not expected to observe the Gricean maxims. For example in a court of law, there are witnesses that are not always expected to volunteer all the information that they have. This would be an example where the speaker is not expected to observe the maxim of quantity (Huang, 2007:26).

2.5 Neo Gricean theory

The validity of Gricean maxims has been questioned in later research. In 1989 Laurence Horn and Stephen Levinson developed what they called the neo-Gricean theory. The reason was that the maxims tend to overlap. Overlap is the term for when the different maxims are closely related to each other. Robert Horn and Stephen Levinson introduced the Q and R principle in order to deal with the overlaps between the maxims (Birner, 2013:77-78). The Q-principle states that a person
should say as much as they can, and the R-principle states that a speaker should not say more than they must. The Q-principle comes from the first sub-maxim of the Gricean maxim of quantity, i.e. that a person should be as informative as possible. The R-principle refers to the second sub-maxim of quantity, i.e. not to be more informative than required. In addition to this, the R-principle involves the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner as well. Huang (2007:41) interprets the Q- and R-principles as the Q-principle being focused on units of speech production, and the R-principle is operating more on semantic information by the speaker.

In Neo Gricean Theory, the maxim of quality is considered to be a super-maxim that operates above the Q and R principle. For example, if a speaker who uses Q-implicature says that they love most people in their class, the hearer can understand the implication that the speaker does not love everybody in class just because the hearer knows that the speaker is trying to say as much as possible. In contrast to Q-implicature, the R-implicature puts a limit to what should be said. In a case like this the speaker keeps the utterance as short as they can, and the hearer may infer that what is said is just an utterance that has a more complicated underlying message (Birner, 2013:78-79).

The reason for choosing Grice's maxims instead of Neo Gricean theory was that Grice's maxims are divided into more specific categories. This makes it easier to define and understand what was peculiar in the conversations analyzed in this study in a more specific way.

### 2.6 Previous research

The Gricean maxims have been used in research on comedy. For instance, Attardo (1993) investigated how failing to observe the co-operative principle could have a comical effect. Attardo's investigation was based on the co-operative principle and Grice’s maxims in relation to jokes. Attardo used material from comedy sketches, and written jokes from books. Then he used the jokes in the sketches and analyzed them with relation to Grice’s conversational maxims in order to see if and how often the maxims were used in order to create comedy. The jokes were also analyzed in relation to the cooperative principle to see if being uncooperative in conversation could lead to comedy. This investigation showed that all jokes investigated involved at least one violation of Grice’s conversational maxims. Moreover, this study showed how all four maxims could be used in order to create humorous situations. This investigation also showed in what ways different jokes can violate the four different conversational maxims in order to be perceived as funny.

Niclas Andresen (2013) also conducted a study on Gricean maxims in comedy. This study investigated failures to observe maxims in the TV series, *Community*. This study investigated the whole main cast in the TV series to compare the different characters observation failures regarding the Gricean maxims. These results from the different characters were then
combined to see how often the maxims failed to be observed in conversations over the eight episodes analyzed. Another study was conducted in a similar manner where Anna Šmilauerová (2012) investigated failures of observing maxims in the comedy series *Friends*. This study investigated all observation failures of all the characters in the series in order to find out how the different characters managed to observe the Gricean maxims in different ways.

3. Method

3.1 Material

The present study was based on four episodes of the TV series *The Office* (Gervais, Merchant and Daniels, 2014). The material used for this study was transcripts from said episodes retrieved from the World Wide Web (Springfield, 2017). However, the official manuscripts from the recordings of the TV series *The Office* were not retrievable so the transcripts used for this study were transcripts of episodes made by fans of the television series in question. In order to ensure that the transcripts were as correct as possible, I chose to cross-reference them with the four recorded episodes in question and thereafter made a total of three adjustments where parts of the dialogue were missing. In order to include episodes from different years, one episode was randomly selected from season 3, 5, 7 and 9 respectively.

3.2 Methodology

The character in focus for this study is Dwight Schrute, and the main aim is to find out how this character observes Grice's conversational maxims in interactions with his co-workers. In the four episodes that have been viewed for this study, the focus was on conversations that Dwight was involved in and the utterances he made. The study showed that Dwight participated in 34 conversations and that he made 121 utterances. The instances where Dwight broke the different maxims were then identified and explained in section 4.1. All instances where Dwight fails to observe maxims are included in the results of this study, but only a few of these instances have been presented as examples in the result section.

This study has a qualitative approach, but also a quantitative one to some degree since numerous conversations and utterances have been analyzed. All of Dwight's conversations have been analyzed in order to see how many times he fails to observe the rules of the maxims. This approach has made it possible to answer the two previously stated research questions on how often Dwight violates one or more of the conversational maxims in conversation, and also if Dwight fails to observe all the maxims to the same extent.
3.3 Episodes

The TV series The Office was first aired in 2005, and ended in 2013. Over the eight years that it was recorded it aired a total of 188 episodes. The episodes that were being analyzed in this study are from seasons 3, 5, 7 and 9 as follows.

1. Season 3, Episode 3: The Coup
2. Season 5, Episode 8: Frame Toby
3. Season 7, Episode 22: The Inner Circle
4. Season 9, Episode 11: Suit Warehouse

The segments from the different episodes are identified with the help of different codes. The 3rd episode from season 3 was coded as [3:3]. The 8th episode from season 5 has the code [5:8]. Episode 22 from the 7th season of this series was given the code [7:22]. Lastly the 11th episode from season 9 was coded [9:11].

3.4 Limitations

The material in this study was analyzed according to Grice's conversational maxims in order to identify instances where failures of observations of these maxims occurred. Nevertheless, if another person interpreted the material it could lead to different results. This study also has limitation because it could not include all episodes; if it had, the results would have been more reliable. Nevertheless, four episodes were considered enough to yield interesting results.

Validity can be seen as the research instruments used in a study and whether they are in fact measuring what the study is focusing on. In qualitative research, validity can also be viewed as the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved from this specific research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011:179). However, the study relies on subjective judgment as to violations of maxims, which might have influenced the validity in a negative way. If another person were to replicate this study the results might differ slightly from those of the present study.

4. Analysis/Results

4.1 Observing and failing to observe maxims

This section will show how different maxims have been observed or not in different manners by the character Dwight. As can be seen in table 1, Dwight has been in a total of 34 conversations
over these four episodes, and in these conversations he has failed to observe the maxim of quantity one time. He has failed to observe the maxim of quality on four separate occasions, and the maxim of relation on six occasions. The maxim of manner has not been observed on one occasion. In the conversations in these episodes he has also failed to observe multiple maxims at the same time. The maxims of quantity and relation have not been observed at the same time in 2 conversations. Another combination that was not observed at the same time was manner and quantity, which was not observed in one conversation. Dwight also failed to observe the maxim of relation and quality in the same conversation. During these episodes Dwight has made 121 utterances over 34 conversations, and he has failed to observe one or more maxims 16 times in these conversations, so in 47% of his conversations he has failed to observe at least one maxim. In the following examples a few examples can be interpreted as belonging to more than one maxim, and these examples have been used in the statistics as failing a combination of maxims.

### Table 1. Dwight's conversations in relation to the Gricean maxims.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maxim:</th>
<th>Number of times Dwight failed to observe the maxim:</th>
<th>Percentage of Dwight failing to observe the maxim:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity + Relation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity + Manner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity + Quality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.1.1 The Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity has only failed to be observed separately on one occasion. This maxim which is failed to be observed in a total of five conversations in this study is only failed to be observed on one occasion on its own. In other words, it seems that when the maxim of quantity is not observed, it is along with a failure of observing another maxim at the same time.

In example 1, Dwight is talking to the camera about him and his former colleague Jim, and how they used to work together on sales calls.

(1) Dwight: “We’d go in pretending to be family--brothers. We did it at a family-owned law firm, at a family-owned construction company, and a family-owned motorcycle store. Jim and Dwight Shrupert. I was the dynamic – Yeah! Likeable winner that was doted upon by mom. Whoo! Yeah! And Jim was the closeted foot fetishist pretending to belong. The client never knew any of that. But I knew.” [9:11]
In example 1, Dwight is observing the first sub-maxim of being as informative as required for this situation since he explains how they worked together on a sales call with a motorcycle store. However, he fails to observe the second sub-maxim of quantity, which is to not say too much. In this conversation, Dwight is going into detail on how Jim's made up character is a closeted foot fetishist pretending to belong. In this implication Dwight is not trying to deceive the cameraman he is talking to, so this is considered to be a flouting on the maxim of quantity.

4.1.2 The Maxim of Quality

Dwight has failed to observe the maxim of quality on four separate occasions, and this maxim is about telling the truth. So in a total of 34 conversations, Dwight is telling lies to the hearer in four of those.

In example 2, Dwight talks to his boss Michael about going to the dentist, but in fact he is going to see the CEO of the company in order to get Michael's job.

(2) Dwight: “I’m going to the dentist. Okay. I have to have an emergency crown put in. Yes. It’s a new dentist. He’s far. I might be gone three hours.” [3:3]

Example 2 above is a situation where Dwight fails to observe the maxim of quality. In this situation, Dwight wants to deceive his boss by saying he is going to the dentist when he is in fact going to see the company's CEO. The sub-maxim of not saying what you believe to be false is not observed here since he is telling a lie because he is in fact going to another meeting. When it comes down to implicature, Dwight is telling a deliberate lie, so this is a violation of the maxim of quality. This is a violation because he is failing to observe the maxims by intentionally deceiving the hearer. However, when it comes to inference the hearer in this case knows that Dwight is actually lying.

In example 3, Dwight calls the police in order to frame his co-worker Toby for using drugs. During this phone call Dwight tells the police his name is Andy Bernard, who is Dwight's co-worker.

(3) Dwight: “Yes, I repeat: a drug dealer is on the premises of Dunder Mifflin. His name is Toby Flenderson, and he recently returned from a mysterious vacation in Central America. I have risked a great deal to tell you this information. My name is Andy Bernard. Andrew Bernard, that's my name. See you soon.” [5:8]

During the conversation above Dwight is failing to observe the maxim of quality by first saying that they have a drug dealer on their premises of Dunder Mifflin, which is a lie through which he is trying to falsely frame his co-worker for using drugs. Thereafter, Dwight continues to lie by introducing himself with the wrong name so as to avoid running into trouble. This is also a clear lie. In this situation, Dwight is failing to observe the first sub-maxim of quality by saying what he
knows to be false. This is a violation of the maxim of quality since he is deliberately telling lies to the police in order to deceive them, so that they infer that everything Dwight says is the truth.

4.1.3 The Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner has failed to be observed in one conversation separately, and in a total of two conversations. This is a maxim that Dwight manages to observe in most of his conversations over these episodes, so this means that over these episodes Dwight often stay away from ambiguous and obscure expression.

In example 4, Dwight's boss is trying to get on Dwight's good side by buying him a cup of coffee. The new boss knows that Dwight does not like him, so this cup of coffee is supposed to be a peace offering, so Dwight takes the cup from Deangello and throws it into the trashcan.

(4) Deangello: “There he is. Got you a coffee”. Dwight: Oh, wow, thank you, that was kind of you. Deangello: Not a coffee guy I take it huh? Dwight: It's just that I own the coffee shop. So once you've seen sausage being made, all you wanna do is make sausage. ‘Cause it's so much fun.” [7:22]

In the example above Dwight manages to observe the sub-maxim of manner that tells the speaker to be orderly. Dwight also manages the sub-maxim of being orderly, because it is easy to follow what he is saying. However, he fails to observe the sub-maxims of staying away from ambiguous and obscure expressions since he is answering by using explaining the process of making sausage instead of just answering the question in a clear manner. In this example, Dwight is not intentionally deceiving the hearer, so this would be a flouting on the maxim of manner, since the hearer is able to infer what Dwight is actually talking about.

4.1.4 The Maxim of Relation

The maxim of relation has failed to be observed by Dwight on six occasions separately, and in a total of eight conversations. This is the most frequent maxim that Dwight fails to observe, so this means that Dwight is a character that is often being irrelevant in his answers and in his conversations over these four episodes.

In example 5, Dwight talks to his new boss that he does not like and who is just trying to have a conversation with Dwight in order to get to know him.

(5) Deangello: “You know I have a cousin who cracked the secret formula for a certain popular cola that I shall not name. So I’ve never had to buy it. True story. I just drink my cousin’s.”
Dwight: “Congratulations on your one cousin. I have 70-- Each one better than the last.” [7:22]

In the example above, Dwight once again fails to be relevant in his answer. Dwight’s boss says that he has a cousin that has the secret formula of coca cola, and that he never had to buy it, and Dwight’s response is that he has 70 cousins, each better than the last, and this is not relevant to the discussion. This failure to observe the maxim of relation is not an intentional deception, so this would classify as a flouting of the maxim of relation.

In example 6, Dwight’s boss, is trying to get one of his employees fired. Dwight is trying to help his boss by coming up with a strategy that could fire this employee for a legal cause.


In this example above, Dwight is talking about framing his co-worker in order to get him fired, but in the middle of his conversation he starts to talk about the TV series The Shield. This TV series is irrelevant for this conversation, and therefore this a failure to observe the maxim of trying to be relevant and saying what is pertinent to the conversation. However, this failure of observing has not been made to deceive the hearer, and therefore it is considered a flouting on the maxim of relation.

4.1.5 Combination of maxims

In the total of 16 observation failures, there were four conversations where multiple maxims were not observed at the same time. In these conversations there were a combination of failures to observe the maxims, and on all of these four occasions, the maxim of quantity was not observed. It seems that the maxim of quantity where the speaker is saying too much, could also lead to failure of observing the other maxims.

In example 7, Dwight is talking to the cameraman and is trying to explain what his perfect crime would be.

(7) Dwight : “What is my perfect crime? I break into Tiffany's at midnight. Do I go for the vault? No. I go for the chandelier. It's priceless. As I’m taking it down, a woman catches me. She tells me to stop. It's her father's business. She's Tiffany. I say no. We make love all night. In the morning, the cops come, and I escape in one of their uniforms. I tell her to meet me in Mexico, but I go to Canada. I don't trust her. Besides, I like the cold. I have a son, he's the chief of police. This is where the story gets interesting. I tell Tiffany to meet me in Paris by the Trocadero. She's been waiting all these years. She's never taken another lover. I don't care. I don't show up. I go to Berlin. That's where I stashed the chandelier.” [5:8]
In the example above, Dwight is failing to observe the sub-maxim of quantity, which is not to say too much. Instead of going into excruciating detail, he could have been as informative as required, but not saying too much. This would not be considered to be an intentional deceit from the speaker, so this would classify as a flouting on the maxim of quantity. Another maxim that Dwight failed to observe was the maxim of manner, one of the sub-maxims of manner tells the speaker to be brief and orderly. In this conversation, Dwight is being orderly, but he fails to be brief in his explanation. This could also classify as a flouting of the maxim of manner since the failure is not made to deceive the hearer.

In example 8, Dwight is talking to his girlfriend, Angela about Michael's boss, and former girlfriend, Jan. Angela is telling Dwight that Jan want to get rid of Michael, and Dwight is trying to defend him.

   (8) Angela: “You know she has it out for him now”! Dwight: “That's not his fault! He had to follow his heart. Ever since Michael dumped Jan for Carole, Jan's been bitching out on him. Reject a woman, and she will never let it go. One of the many defects of their kind. Also weak arms.” [3:3]

In example 8, Dwight observes the first sub-maxim of quantity by being as informative as required by explaining that Jan is the one ruining their firm out of jealousy, so this means that he follows the cooperative principle. However, at the end of his utterance he fails to observe the sub-maxim of not being more informative than needed in a conversation by talking about women having weak arms. In this instance, Dwight is not trying to deceive the hearer, and therefore this would classify as flouting the maxim of quantity. Another maxim that was not observed in this conversation is the maxim of relation. In the end of this conversation, Dwight adds the comment that women have another flaw except never letting things go, namely that they have weak arms. This is an example where Dwight fails to be relevant since it has little to do what they are discussing. This is not meant to deceive the hearer can infer what Dwight is talking about, and therefore this would also be considered flouting the maxim of relation.

5. Discussion

The present study has tried to answer two questions: How often does Dwight violate Grice's conversational maxims? And to what extent does he fail to observe these maxims during these episodes? In the material that was studied, Dwight took part in 34 different conversations with colleagues or other people from the TV-series. In 16 of these conversations he broke at least one maxim. Consequently, Dwight broke one or more maxims in 47% of his conversations in some
way. It is difficult to compare these results to the findings stated by Attardo (1993) who suggests that all jokes are actually violations of maxims. Dwight violated maxims in 47% of his conversations, so during these 47%, the conversations could have been made up to create jokes and the other 53% was not used to create humor. Niclas Andresen's (2013) study focused on finding out what Gricean maxims failed to be observed the most in the TV series, *Community*. The results of his study showed that the maxims of quality and quantity were the maxims that were not observed most frequently. The results of my study showed that the maxims that were most frequently failed were the maxims of quality, quantity and relation. These two studies showed quite similar results. However, in addition to the maxims of quality and quantity, Dwight fails to observe the maxim of relation in a higher rate than the characters in the TV series, *Community*. The study conducted by Anna Šmilauerová (2012) is interesting regarding the comparisons between the characters Phoebe with Dwight. Phoebe failed to observe the maxim of relation at a high rate, and the maxim that she failed to observe the most frequent after the maxim of relation is the maxim of quality. The results of the character Phoebe is similar to the results of the character Dwight in this present study. When discussing failures of observing maxims, Phoebe failed to observe the maxim of relation at a rate of 35% and the maxim of quality to a rate of 14%, where as in Dwight’s 16 observation failures the maxim of relation was not observed in 37% of his conversations, and the maxim of quality was failed to be observed at a 25% rate. It can be concluded that these characters are often being irrelevant or lying in order to create comedic effect in these TV series.

When counting separate and multiple failures in this study, the numbers show that the maxim of relation was not observed in a total of eight conversations, and the maxim of quantity was not observed in five conversations. The maxim of quality was not observed on five times by Dwight in this investigative paper, and the maxim of manner was not observed in two conversations. So, Dwight is more often lying, or being irrelevant than saying too much or using obscure or ambiguous utterances. However, as it turned out, it was easier to identify the maxim of relation, quantity and quality than it was to identify the maxim of manner. This is because it was easier to interpret what is relevant, too much, or a lie in his utterances than for example to say what was obscure and ambiguous expression. Consequently, this might be why relatively fewer instances were found where the maxim of manner was not observed. Since this comes down to interpretation it could be that misinterpretation has skewed the results of this study to some degree, and this would affect the validity and reliability in this study.
6. Conclusion

The Gricean maxims was in focus for this study, and the character I chose to analyze in relation to the maxims was Dwight Schrute, a character from the TV series, The Office. This study dealt with Grice’s conversational maxims and how some of the rules from this model are sometimes not observed. The goal of this investigation was to find out how often Dwight broke one or more of these maxims in conversation, but also to find to what extent he fails to observe the different maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner.

The results from this study were not very surprising – Dwight is a character that that is often perceived as funny because of the conversations with his co-workers. This study was made on four different episodes, and the results showed that Dwight managed to fail observing at least one maxim on 16 occasions in a total of 34 conversations. In other words, he fails to observe a maxim in 47% of his conversations. The maxim that Dwight failed to observe the most was the maxim relation, which was not observed in eight conversations. Other maxims that Dwight failed to observe quite frequently were the maxim of quality and quantity, which was not observed in five conversations each. The maxims that he did not fail to observe that often was the maxim of manner, which was not observed on two occasions. So the results of this study show that the character Dwight often fails to be relevant regarding context in his conversations, as well as to speak the truth. The maxim of manner, which is the maxim that Dwight handles best, shows that Dwight often stays away from obscurity and ambiguity.

In future studies in this area it would be interesting to investigate how often the Gricean maxims are failed to be observed in regular conversations, for example in the workplace. It could also be interesting to investigate how maxims are not observed in TV shows, and how violations, opt-outs and flouts are distributed within these failures of observation.
References

Primary Sources


Secondary sources


