Flouting the maxims in scripted speech

An analysis of flouting the maxims of conversation in the television series *Firefly*

Brott mot maximer i manusförfattade samtal
En analys av brott mot konversationsmaximerna i TV-serien *Firefly*

Peter Szczepanski
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Author: Peter Szczepanski

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Abstract:

Although conversations in television shows are supposed to mimic and represent everyday natural speech, they are written for a specific purpose. The aim of this paper is to find out what maxims are flouted the most in the television series Firefly and analyse what the effects of these flouts are. Presented here is an analysis of how scripted conversation in the aforementioned television show is constructed. By applying Grice's cooperative principle and his theories on flouting and implicatures, certain patterns emerge that show recurring uses of flouts for specific effects. The results are based on a study of three episodes of the television series Firefly. The results show that the maxim of quality is flouted the most and that the distribution of flouts between characters is somewhat uneven. This suggests that the use of flouts has to do with the personalities of the different characters.

Keywords: conversational maxims, cooperative principle, H.P. Grice, flouting, implicature

Sammanfattning:


Nyckelord: konversationsmaximer, samarbetsprincipen, H.P. Grice, maximbrott, implicatur
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1. Introduction and aims

Entertainment is something that all people crave from time to time. Everyday life can get a little dull without some sort of amusement. From the early 20th century, the film industry has grown to be a multi-billion dollar industry and one of the largest entertainment industries today. Furthermore, in the last couple of decades, it seems that TV-series have risen in popularity as the main story-telling medium. There are of course many different factors responsible for this popularity trend, but one reason may be that a television series has the space needed to tell a story in more depth and detail when compared to a big screen film. Moreover, a television series can also create characters with interesting background stories and give them more space for character development.

It is an intriguing thought that characters seen on film and TV are created through speech. What these characters say and how they react to each other’s lines is what brings the characters to life. Of course there are other important aspects such as facial expressions, posture and even their clothes. Each of these factors plays an important role, but it can easily be argued that no factor plays a more important role than what they actually say. The scripted speech seen on TV is supposed to mimic and represent everyday speech in, for the most part, everyday situations. Therefore, how ordinary speech is conducted and the rules governing it is of great interest to screenwriters. Speech is the most basic and common way of human communication. However, in any conversation there are guidelines and norms for how a conversation should be conducted in order for the interlocutors to understand each other. Most of these guidelines or norms are followed unconsciously and are not something that we usually need to keep in mind. They are, however, important, because they give us the tools we need to successfully analyse speech.

In 1967, Paul Grice presented his theory of what he called the *co-operation principle* (Levinson 1983:102). By taking part in a conversation, the person doing so is indicating a willingness to co-operate and abide by the rules that follow (Cruse 2000:355). Grice’s co-operation principle states that each conversationalist “should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information” (Levinson 1983:104). However, the co-operation principle is not a *prescription* for how to conduct successful conversations but should instead be seen as a *description*. It does not have to be followed and should be seen as a guideline rather than a rule (Cruse 2000:357). Furthermore, the co-operation principle can be broken down into four maxims. Grice made a distinction between two general levels of meaning in language. What is actually being *said* is one level of meaning while what is *meant* is another (Börjesson 2014:100). This distinction is very important, since it constitutes the foundation for what Grice called *implicatures*. When a conversation takes place, both conversationalists are trying to follow the co-operation principle to the best of their abilities. However, if a maxim is broken, the other conversationalist will assume
that the co-operation principle is still in effect and look for the implied meaning.

(1) Brother: Is mom home yet?  
    Sister: The car is not in the driveway.¹

In (1) the answer that the sister gives does not really answer her brother's question on a surface level (what is said). It may therefore be seen as a non-co-operative response. Yet we can interpret the answer on a deeper, non-surface level to understand the meaning (what is meant) (Levinson 1983:102). Therefore, the implicature of the sister's answer is that their mother is not home yet, since her car is not in the driveway.

This sort of non-observance of the maxims is called *flouting* and is very common. Weiwei (2012:22) states that the “deliberate violation of the co-operation principle is the linguistic basis of humour.” However, as can be seen in (1), maxims can be flouted for different purposes and flouts can have other effects besides humour. As will be shown, flouting can also be used for effects such as metaphors, being discreet or sarcasm etc. The aim of this paper is to investigate the structure of conversation in the television science-fiction series *Firefly* and identify instances of flouting and their’ effects. This study will examine a total of three episodes with the following research questions in mind:

1. How often are each of the four maxims flouted and which one is flouted the most?
2. What are the effects of these flouts?
3. Are some kinds of flouts characteristic of a specific character?
4. Can flouting generate other effects than humour in scripted speech?

2. Background

In this section follows a presentation of the previous research that this paper is based upon. Subsection 2.1 consists of a general discussion and an attempt at a definition of pragmatics. What follows in subsections 2.2-2.2.3 is a presentation of Grice and his theories about conversational co-operation and implicatures. Finally, in subsection 2.2.4, the different kinds of non-observance of Grice's maxims are presented and discussed.

¹ If no source is given, the example is my own.
2.1 Pragmatics

The term *pragmatics* is by no means easy to define. There is a large range of different definitions proposed by scholars. The diversity of definitions is, however, not surprising. Different academic fields are in essence congeries of subject matters, preferred methods and assumptions that each uses a definition that suits their intentions (Levinson 1983:5). The obvious issue here is that “speakers frequently mean much more than their words actually say” (Thomas 1995:1). This simple truth tells us that there are different levels of meaning in utterances. As previously mentioned, Grice emphasized two general levels of meaning; *what is said* and *what is meant*. Grice himself did not call both of these levels of meaning pragmatics. He argued that the processes leading to the second level of meaning, *what is meant*, is of pragmatic nature. The first level of meaning, *what is said*, would rather be of semantic nature (Börjesson 2014:100). It is also important to note that while what is said can be independent of speaker intentions, what is meant is essential to it. Grice therefore argued that what is said is part of what is meant, not the other way around (Börjesson 2014:100).

Textbooks of pragmatics have also made an attempt at defining the term. Thomas argues that modern “textbooks tend to fall into one of two camps” (Thomas 1995:2). Although these terms are not used explicitly, for simplicity the two camps can be called *speaker meaning* and *utterance interpretation*. Speaker meaning tends to be favoured by those with a social view on the discipline and focuses firmly on the producer of the utterance. In contrast, utterance meaning focuses on the receiver and tends to be the preferred definition by those who take a cognitive approach. However, both of these definitions fall short since they ignore the levels of meaning that lie in the process of conversation (Thomas 1995:2).

In order to get a reasonably clear definition of what pragmatics really is about, we need to start at the beginning. In the early years of the 20th century, many philosophers were concerned that everyday language was somewhat defective, since it was full of ambiguities and contradictions. Therefore, they sought to create an ideal language by refining it, removing any imperfections and illogicalities (Thomas 1995:29). One of the people that responded to this and has since been credited as one of the founding fathers of pragmatics was J.L. Austin. He was a philosopher working at Oxford University in the 1940s and 1950s. Here he delivered most of his ideas about language that have since become so influential. It is also noteworthy that H.P. Grice was one of his pupils (Thomas 1995:28). Austin and his group of followers observed that people manage to communicate very efficiently with language just the way it is. This led him to the conclusion that instead of trying to get rid of the perceived imperfections in language, we should strive to understand how people can communicate so well with it (Thomas 1995:29). Furthermore, Austin was firm in his belief that “there is a lot more to a language than the meaning of its words and
phrases” (Austin, quoted in Thomas 1995:31). This led him to the conviction “that we do not just use language to say things (to make statements) but to do things (perform actions)” (Austin, quoted in Thomas 1995:31). This notion that there are several levels of meaning within words, phrases and sentences became the starting point of what would later be called pragmatics.

Thomas attempts to give her own definition of pragmatics by distinguishing three different levels of meaning. She calls the first of these levels abstract meaning and it is concerned with what a word, phrase or sentence could mean (Thomas 1995:2). This first level of meaning falls more or less under the category of semantics. When trying to interpret the meaning of a word or utterance, the obvious problem is the “multiplicity of semantic uses of a single word form” (Cruse 1986:51). For example, the word bank can have (at least) two distinct meanings. Such words are called ambiguous because the same form of the word bank can mean both ‘a financial institution’ and 'the side of a river’ (Cruse 1986:51). It is the context of where the word is used that indicates its meaning, which leads to Thomas' second level, contextual meaning. In the process of determining what a speaker means, context is needed. The listener makes an assumption about the intended meaning of the utterance based on the context in which it is used (Thomas 1995:6).

(2) Son: Can I have a piece of candy?  
Mother: Dinner's almost ready!

Just like previously stated, we often mean more than we say. In (2) the answer given by the mother is not just a statement saying that the dinner is almost ready. Such a statement would be illogical since the son asked a yes or no question. Yet, the answer given still makes sense, since the listener can understand the implied meaning behind the answer due to the context.

The third and final level of meaning, force, is concerned with the intention of the speaker. It is important to make a distinction between understanding what an utterance means and what the intention of that utterance is. For example, take the sentence “Is that your car?” (Thomas 1995:18). Although the listener might not have any problems with understanding the utterance meaning, the intended force behind the question may not be obvious. In this example, the speaker can have one of several intentions, e.g. a request to move the car or a request for a lift etc. (Thomas 1995:18).

Thomas uses these three distinct levels of meaning to define the term pragmatics which results in the definition “meaning in interaction” (Thomas 1995:22). She argues that such a definition reflects the view that meaning is not inherent in words, phrases or sentences alone. Nor is meaning produced by the speaker or the listener individually. Creating meaning in conversation is a dynamic, co-operative process that involves different factors such as negotiations between speaker and listener, context, and meaning potential of the utterances (Thomas 1995:22).
2.2 H.P. Grice

Even though Grice’s work can be seen as a bit sketchy in places and he is frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted, in the development of pragmatics, his theory has been one of the most influential (Thomas 1995:56). Herbert Paul Grice was born in 1913 and started his academic career as a student at Oxford University (Sbisà et al. 2011:105). Just like the previously mentioned J.L. Austin, Grice was also a philosopher. In 1967, Grice was invited to give the William James lectures at Harvard University (Thomas 1995:56). In his now famous lectures, he popularized the concepts of co-operation and implicature. Here, he approached the many layers of meaning on a semantic level and “showed the existence of implicatures where no one had previously expected them” (Kotthoff 2006:272). Grice also expanded upon his theory in papers published in 1978 and 1981, but he never really developed his work fully. Since he left his work unfinished, “there are many gaps and several inconsistencies in his writings” (Thomas 1995:56).

Grice laid the groundwork in the field of pragmatics and established the fact that conversations are organized and structured. His co-operation principle established that all participants in a conversation must, at least to some extent, co-operate to achieve their purpose, whatever that purpose might be. This is true for any conversation; each conversationalist needs to understand the other no matter if it is a friendly conversation between co-workers or an aggressive debate with fierce arguments (Martinich 1980:215). Furthermore, “the notion of conversational implicature is one of the single most important ideas in pragmatics” (Levinson 1983:97) and much of the work done in this field can be credited to Grice. In essence, Grice tried to explain how a listener gets from the level of what is said, the expressed meaning, to what is meant, the implied meaning (Thomas 1995:56).

Grice’s co-operation principle has also been widely criticised. Since the co-operation principle seems to be describing ideal conversations with little or no problems of exchange at all, it has been argued that it is vacuous. It has also been noted that there is a problem with intentionality (Mooney 2004:900). However, Mooney argues against such criticism in the following way:

> While the relationship of speaker intention to meaning is not only relevant to implicature, it is certainly a part of it. It seems to me that there does not have to be a retrieval of intention as such for the retrieval of implicature. Rather, the hearer assumes that the speaker is following the co-operation principle and maxims and the intention is *reconstructed* rather than *retrieved*. (Mooney 2004:900)

What this means is that the listener does not retrieve the intention of the speaker, but rather reconstructs it by assuming that the speaker is following the co-operation principle. What Mooney
concludes here is that if the speaker is trying to convey an implicature, that implicature goes through a process where the listener makes an assumption about the speaker intention and then he or she reconstructs it based on that assumption.

### 2.2.1 The Co-operation Principle

Grice's work sought to explain how participants in a conversation are successful in their communication. He concluded that each interlocutor in a conversation assumes an understanding to co-operate to some extent in a meaningful way (Bousfield 2008:22). He called this phenomenon the *co-operation principle* or *co-operative principle*. Grice himself phrased the principle like this:

> 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.  
> (Grice 1975, quoted in Bousfield 2008:22)

Since Grice expressed this principle in the imperative mood, it has led to some conflicting ideas about his work. Some casual readers of Grice seem to believe that Grice tried to tell speakers how they should behave in a conversation, which is certainly not the case. In reality, what Grice was suggesting was that in conversational interaction, participants assume that a certain set of rules is in operation, unless there is some clear indication of the contrary (Thomas 1995:62). Grice also wanted to point out that participants in a conversation do not always follow these rules to the letter, but both conversationalists still assume that the co-operation principle is still in effect and can therefore make sense of what is said. To make this clear, take a look at the following example.

(3) *The speaker has accidentally locked herself out of her house. It is winter, the middle of the night and she is stark naked.*  
A: Do you want a coat?  
B: No, I really want to stand out here in the freezing cold with no clothes on. (Thomas 1995:63)

Taken literally, B's answer seems to be non-co-operative and fails to answer A's question. “Yet, it is clear that despite this apparent failure of co-operation, we try to interpret B's utterance as nevertheless co-operative at some deeper level” (Levinson 1983:102). This is done by assuming that B's answer is in fact co-operative and then figuring out what the answer actually means (Levinson 1983:102). Since A is assuming that the co-operation principle is in effect, A will look for another interpretation of the utterance. “Grice argues that without the assumption that the speaker is operating according to the co-operation principle, there is no mechanism to prompt someone to seek
for another level of interpretation” (Thomas 1995:63). This process will be looked at in detail in sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4.

### 2.2.2 The Conversational Maxims

The co-operation principle was elaborated by Grice in that he provided a set of conversational maxims that help to explain what it actually means to co-operate in a conversation (Cruse 2000:355). Grice proposed four such maxims that help to show how successful communication is conducted. These maxims also help us to establish what the implied meaning of an utterance might be (Thomas 1995:63). It is important to note, just as previously stated, that these are not a set of rules that are supposed to be followed to the letter. They are more like guidelines that are to be followed to the best of one's ability and can thus be creatively infringed or even conflict with one another. Grice also wanted to emphasize that these maxims are not culturally bound conventions and would therefore be expected to be observed in any human society (Cruse 2000:357). He even went as far as suggesting that the maxims “describe rational means for conducting co-operative exchanges” (Levinson 1983:103). In other words, any and all activity which includes some form of co-operation between its participants is governed by the maxims.

The first maxim is the maxim of *quality*. It tells conversationalists to be truthful which can be described in two parts:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (Grice 2013 [1975]: 308)

Next comes the maxim of *quantity*, which tells interlocutors how much information should be provided in a conversation.

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Grice 2013 [1975]: 308)

The third, the maxim of *relation*, simply states that one should be relevant. The point to make here is that “it is not sufficient for a statement to be true for it to constitute an acceptable conversational contribution” (Cruse 2000:356).

Grice's last maxim is the maxim of *manner*, which is also the one that needs the most clarification. Grice explained the maxim of manner by providing a supermaxim that simply states
be perspicuous, but elaborated by providing four additional points to follow (Grice 2013 [1975]: 308).

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly. (Grice 2013 [1975]: 308)

The manner maxim, in contrast to the others, does not really concern what is being said but rather how it is being said (Bousfield 2008:22). How the utterance is delivered can have great impact on how it is interpreted. Furthermore, Grice also wanted to point out that the list of sub-maxims given in the manner category may very well be incomplete (Bousfield 2008:23).

2.2.3 Implicatures

Grice wanted to emphasize the fact that unlike grammatical rules, a person can choose not to adhere to the maxims (Levinson 1983:103). Obviously, one could also choose to throw grammatical rules out of the window but it would make one's speech next to impossible to understand. When the maxims are not being observed something interesting happens. As shown in (3), person A can still make sense of the answer since it is assumed that the co-operation principle is in effect. Furthermore, the maxims help to explain what the implied meaning of B's answer is.

In his lectures and writings on implicatures, Grice wanted to explain how it is that people manage to understand indirect utterances that carry implicit meanings. His theory is based on the assumption that people are inherently co-operative in conversations. His proposed maxims are supposed not only to govern our production of messages but also our ability of interpretation (Brumark 2006:1210). Implicatures arise when there is additional meaning conveyed beyond the semantic meaning of the words uttered (Thomas 1995:57). In many cases in everyday conversations, inferences arise that give further meaning to utterances. It is these kinds of inferences that are called implicatures (Levinson 1983:103).

(4) 
Wife: What do you want for dinner?
Husband: I grabbed a burger on my way home.

In (4), it is clear that the husband is not observing the relation maxim, since his answer does not seem to answer his wife's question. Yet, if we assume that the answer is co-operative, then it must have some other meaning as well. The implicature in this case is that the husband does not want
dinner because he is not hungry.

Grice distinguished between two different kinds of implicatures, conventional and conversational. Both types of implicature convey another level of meaning beyond the semantic meaning of the utterance. Conventional implicatures always carry the same meaning, regardless of the context. Conversational implicatures, however, vary according to context and are therefore more flexible and harder to interpret (Thomas 1995:57).

Conventional implicatures are non-truth conditional inferences that are attached to some lexical items or expressions by convention rather than from some superordinate pragmatic principles (Levinson 1983:127). For this reason, there are just a few lexical items that carry a conventional implicature. Both Levinson (1983:127) and Thomas (1995:57) give the same four examples: but, even, therefore and yet. These words will always carry the same implicature, regardless of the context (Thomas 1995:57).

(5) He is a nerd but not at all ugly.

In (5), it is not asserted that nerds in general are ugly. However, the use of the word but implies that this is the case. “The word but carries the implicature that what follows will run counter to expectations” (Thomas 1995:57). Such conventional implicatures are also detachable because, in contrast to conversational implicatures that rely on context, conventional implicatures are attached to its lexical item. For example, if the word but is substituted for the word and in (5), the sentence will still retain the same truth-conditions but the implicature is lost (Levinson 1983:128).

The other form of implicature, conversational implicatures, relies entirely on context to convey additional meaning. The same expression can carry different implicatures depending on the context. Cruse tries to show the difference between the two forms by giving an example.

(6) A: Have you cleared the table and washed the dishes?
   B: I've cleared the table.

   A: Am I in time for supper?
   B: I've cleared the table. (Cruse 2000:349)

In (6), the same utterance from B carries two different implicatures. In the first example, B implies that the dishes have not been washed yet. The implicature arises from B's obvious non-observance of the quantity maxim. In the second example, B implies that A is not in time for supper. In this case, the implicature comes from B's non-observance of the relation maxim. In both of these examples, A can still make sense of the answers provided by B, since B is overtly choosing not to
observe the maxims. The non-observance needs to be obvious enough for the listener to look for another meaning beyond the expressed one in order for an implicature to arise (Thomas 1995:65).

2.2.4 Flouting and other non-observances

Flouting is a term that was coined by Grice that describes the process in which a conversational implicature is generated by exploiting the maxims. A flout occurs when a speaker overtly chooses not to observe one or more maxims with the deliberate intention of creating an implicature. What this means is that the speaker is not trying to mislead, deceive or be uncooperative but rather prompting the listener to look for meaning beyond the semantic level (Thomas 1995:65). Cruse gives three requirements that have to be met in order for an implicature to occur when a speaker is flouting one or more maxims (Cruse 2000:360).

(A) It is obvious to the hearer that the maxims are being flouted.
(B) It is obvious to the hearer that the speaker intends the hearer to be aware that the maxims are being flouted.
(C) There are no signs that the speaker is opting out of the co-operative principle. (Cruse 2000:360)

If these three requirements are met, the listener has received the signal that the utterance is not meant to be interpreted at a surface level and that some sort of deeper meaning is being conveyed (Cruse 2000:360). Flouting is based heavily on the co-operation between interlocutors (Levinson 1983:109). It has to be abundantly clear to the listener that the speaker is choosing not to observe a specific maxim.

(7) Mother: Charles, do you know who ate all the candy?
   Charles: It was John or Susan and I don't think it was Susan.

A response such as the one Charles is providing will set in motion a process that leads the mother to the actual meaning of Charles' answer. First of all, the answer provided by Charles seems to violate the maxim of quantity, since more information than required is given. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that Charles is trying to be uncooperative and his answer is therefore seen as co-operative. Since Charles is actually trying to be co-operative, his mother must try to work out what sort of reason there is behind his obvious flouting of the maxim of quantity. The reason for Charles' flout can be explained if one assumes that he was trying to observe the maxim of quality. There is a clash between the two, because Charles does not want to say anything that he does not have
adequate evidence for. His answer can therefore be seen as a compromise, where he is signalling that he strongly believes that it was John who ate all the candy, but at the same time he signals that his belief might not be accurate (Thomas 1995:65-66).

While flouting can be used to create different effects, it is most commonly used to create comedy in both everyday speech as well as in television shows. Weiwei (2012:22) argues that conversational humour is often a result of not observing the co-operation principle. However, as Levinson (1983:109) points out, co-operation is the foundation of flouting. It is important to make the distinction between non-ob servance of the maxims and non-ob servance of the co-operation principle. By not observing the co-operation principle, the speaker signals an unwillingness to co-operate. However, as shown in (7), a speaker may choose not to observe a maxim but still show a willingness to co-operate. The maxims can therefore be seen as the tools we use to interpret messages.

(8) David: How are we getting to the party?
Billy: Well, we're getting there in John's car.

In (8), Billy is blatantly giving less information than is required (flouting the maxim of quantity), which in turn generates an implicature. By emphasizing we're in the sentence, Billy is signalling to David that they have arranged a lift to the party, but that David is not going with them (Thomas 1995:69). In this example, the effect is a rather rude way of telling David to make his own arrangements for getting to the party.

There are also other ways of non-ob servance concerning maxims, namely violating, opting out, infringing and suspending a maxim. Since the focus of this paper is on flouting, the other forms of non-ob servance will only be discussed briefly. The term violate was defined by Grice himself as the unostentatious non-ob servance of a maxim. In other words, Grice's definition of the term states that a speaker that is violating a maxim is liable to mislead (Thomas 1995:72).

(9) A husband comes home late one night after having spent time with his lover.
Wife: Where have you been?
Husband: I was stuck at work.

Note that in (9) no implicature is created since the husband is covertly breaking the maxim of quality by lying to his wife. By comparing examples (3) and (9), the distinction between overtly and covertly breaking the maxims should become obvious. In (3), the break in the maxim of quality is overt since it seems very unlikely that she wants to stand naked outside in the cold. In contrast, the break of the maxim of quality in (9) is covert since the answer given by the husband could very well
be the truth.

The next type of non-observance is called *opting out* of a maxim. A person opting out of a
maxim is showing an “unwillingness to co-operate in the way that the maxim requires” (Thomas
1995:74). This sort of non-observance is common in public life where a speaker might be able to
answer in a way that is normally expected. Examples where one might encounter such non-
observances can be found when the speaker involved is bound by some sort of confidentiality
agreement such as counsellors, police officers or priests (Thomas 1995:74).

Speakers who have failed to observe a maxim without the intention to generate an implicature or
mislead the listener can be said to *infringe* the maxim. Such non-observance stems from the
speakers imperfect linguistic performance in the language. Examples of such non-observance can
be foreign speakers or children who do not have full mastery of the language. Moreover, an adult
native speaker can also infringe a maxim, for example when the speaker's performance is somehow
impaired. Reasons for such impairment may be drunkenness, excitement or simply because the
speaker in constitutionally incapable of speaking clearly (Thomas 1995:74).

The last type of non-observance is called *suspending* a maxim. In contrast to the other types of
non-observances, suspending a maxim is based on cultural and social norms. Such non-observance
does not generate an implicature because the non-observance is seen as the culturally or socially
accepted norm and the speaker is not expected to observe that particular maxim in that context. In
this sense, the non-observance is motivated and is not seen as uncooperative (Thomas 1995:76).

Thomas (1995:77) gives an example of suspending a maxim: In the acting community in Britain
people refrain from saying the name of Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* because it is believed to be bad
luck. Instead they refer to it as *The Scottish Play*, and thereby they are not observing the maxim of
quantity.

### 3. Method

The aim of this study is to find out how Grice's maxims and his co-operation principle can be used
to analyse and explain how certain effects in scripted dialogue are achieved. Previous research has
found that flouting can be used to a large extent when creating comedy. However, this paper sets out
to show instances of flouting in a setting where it has not been studied before. By studying
segments of dialogue from the television science-fiction series *Firefly* in detail, I intend to find
instances of flouting and determine their implicatures and their function in depicting the characters.
3.1 Material

Since one aim of this paper is to find some evidence of flouting that generates other effects than humorous ones, the material chosen is the television drama/Sci-Fi show *Firefly*. While it does have its humorous elements, humour is not the main focus of the show. It is more or less a character story which is driven forward by the personalities of the characters rather than by the events that surround them. Since a TV-series gives the scriptwriters more space than a film to tell the storyline as well as giving in-depth character development, the audience develops a much closer relationship with the characters in comparison to shorter story-telling mediums such as films. Although the series was a bit on the short side (only 14 episodes), the audience can still get to know the characters intimately. Each of them has their own unique character traits which are shown in both their conversation as well as in their actions. The show was chosen as material for the study primarily for this reason. By studying instances of flouting and determining which maxims are being flouted, I set out to see patterns and links between specific characters and the maxims they flout. The three episodes chosen for the study are named *Serenity*, *The train job* and *Shindig*. These episodes were chosen primarily because they are among the first episodes in the series.

The show itself takes place in a future where mankind has left the earth to populate other solar systems. Furthermore, mankind has split up into two factions and a great war has been fought between them. One faction is called *the alliance* and the other calls itself *the independents*. The first episode of the show starts with some scenes from the war and shows the main protagonist Sergeant Malcolm Reynolds and his second-in-command Zoe Washburne in a gunfight. However, they are soon given orders to surrender and the setting soon changes to a few years later. The war is now over and Malcolm and Zoe are now living on a spaceship called Serenity, identification class Firefly, with a crew that Malcolm has assembled. The rest of the story takes place on the ship and the various planets that they visit. An important part of the story is that the alliance won the war. Since Malcolm and Zoe still despise the alliance and live their lives as small time criminals (smuggling and scavenging), they try to evade the alliance at every corner. For this reason, most of the show takes place at the outskirts of populated space, since these planets are usually not visited and monitored as frequently by the alliance as the central planets. The so-called “border planets” are also much less technologically advanced, which results in a setting that is reminiscent of old western films. The series thus features a combination of the American Wild West and science-fiction.

*Firefly* did not reach widespread popularity until after it was cancelled. The show aired on Fox in 2002-2003 and received little attention during its short time on the network. However, after the show was cancelled, fans of the show made enormous uproars which eventually caught the attention of the great mass of television viewers. In a matter of months, the show had grown in popularity and
had received major critical acclaim. However, the decision had already been made and while many fans have tried to bring the show back to life, it has at the time of writing this paper been 11 years since the show was cancelled. Fortunately for the fans, creator and director Joss Whedon was hired by Fox to create an epic finale to the series in the form of the feature film *Serenity*. The aim was to give the story a fitting end while also providing some answers to questions that were left unanswered when the show was cancelled. The film had its première in 2005 and has since, just like the TV-show, received major critical acclaim. While the Internet is still buzzing and many people are still trying to revive the show, there is no indication of that happening in the near future.

### 3.1.1 Characters

Throughout the fourteen episodes, the audience briefly encounters many characters with various levels of importance to the story. However, the focus of this study is on the main characters of the show, which is the crew of Serenity. The crew is made up of a total of nine characters who are all on the ship for different reasons.

The main protagonist of the story is Malcolm Reynolds, henceforth referred to as Malcolm. He was a volunteer in the war between the alliance and the independents and has since the end of the war been the captain of the spaceship Serenity. Malcolm is portrayed as practical rather than intellectual and he does not seem to have a particular goal with anything that he does. He is simply trying to get by and keep his ship flying. In the feature film *Serenity*, Malcolm says, “If the wind blows northerly, I go north.” Moreover, he is very loyal to his crew, which becomes like a surrogate family.

Zoe Washburne, henceforth referred to as Zoe, is Malcolm's second-in-command and the wife of Hoban Washburne. Zoe served under Malcolm's command during the war, which is also why she is the only one to call him “sir”. Zoe is a tough, dangerous woman who is unconditionally loyal to Malcolm. The relationships with her husband Hoban and Captain Malcolm bring out two very different sides of the character. In her relationship with Malcolm, the audience sees her as a stone-cold soldier, but as the wife of Hoban, she is portrayed as loving and caring. This gives the character an interesting depth, which is further explored throughout the episodes.

Hoban Washburne, henceforth referred to as Wash, is the pilot of Serenity and the husband of Zoe. He is only ever referred to as Wash and his real name is not actually revealed until the end of the feature film. Wash serves as the funny one in the group and is portrayed as an easy-going and loving husband. He also often serves as a calming influence when there are heated arguments between crew members. While Wash is a stranger to violence and gunfights, he is incredibly loyal to the rest of the crew and does not hesitate to do what is necessary in order to protect them. He is also a very skilled pilot.
Inara Serra, henceforth referred to as Inara, is a prostitute (a profession known as companion) and serves as an ambassador on the ship. In high society, companions are seen as part of the social elite. They are intellectual, sophisticated and often accompany men with wealth and power. Her professional high status and education are the reasons why she serves as the ambassador of the ship. Her own reasons for being on the ship are unclear, although it is hinted that she is fleeing from something. She also serves as the love interest of Malcolm. This is for the most part expressed in the form of jesting and bickering between them with the occasional hint that they are attracted to each other.

Jayne Cobb, henceforth referred to as Jayne, starts off as a hired mercenary to be the muscle of the crew but throughout the series he develops a close relationship with them and he slowly becomes a part of Malcolm's surrogate family. Jayne is a brutish, practical guy with bad manners and while he is often portrayed as simple-minded, it is hinted from time to time that he is cunning, decent and has common sense. In a flashback seen in episode five, the audience learns that Malcolm and Zoe first met Jayne when they were ambushed by him and a crew of mercenaries. However, Jayne switched sides and joined Malcolm and Zoey after being offered a larger cut of the bounty and various privileges on board the ship.

Kaywinnet Lee Frye, referred to by the crew as Kaylee, is the ship's on-board mechanic. Kaylee is a down-to-earth and kind girl who maintains a bright and positive attitude, even when the rest of the crew is agitated. Even though she does not have any formal training, she has exceptional mechanical aptitude. In some sense, Kaylee serves as the good conscience of the crew and she genuinely loves all of them as her family. Moreover, she expresses an exuberance and enjoys the small things in life such as strawberries or a pretty dress. Finally, she is also the love interest of Simon, but just like Malcolm and Inara, this is never acted out.

Simon Tam, henceforth referred to as Simon, is the brother of River Tam and the on-board medic. He is a highly trained doctor that graduated in the top three percent of his class from the best medical school on one of the central planets. Shortly after his sister was admitted to an alliance elite academy, Simon found out that she was being hurt in some experiment where they were examining her brain. He rescues her from the academy but in doing so, they both become fugitives, which is why they seek refuge on-board the ship. Simon is sophisticated, very well-mannered and comes from a world very different from the rest of the crew, with a few exceptions. This clash of high and low society is often very amusing and has some interesting results.

River Tam, henceforth referred to as River, is the sister of Simon and she is probably the most unique character of the group. She is an extremely gifted teenage girl and is portrayed as a prodigy with intelligence and knowledge well beyond her years. Since Simon and River grew up together they have formed a very close and intimate relationship over the years. They rely completely on
each other and love each other unconditionally. Since River has been the subject of experiments which has left her permanently brain-damaged, Simon serves as her caretaker. Her brain-damage is often expressed with odd behaviour and incoherent speech as well as outbursts of both a physical and a mental nature.

Lastly, Derrial Book, often referred to as Shepherd Book or Preacher, is a travelling priest who originally intended his stay on Serenity to be temporary. However, he soon formed a relationship with the crew and decided to stay on the ship. The background of Book is clouded in mystery and not much is revealed about him. Furthermore, he shows on various occasions that he has good knowledge in unexpected fields such as hand-to-hand combat, firearms and criminal activity.

The crew on board Serenity is very close with each other and forms a sort of family. There is no obvious direction of the story other than a strive to move forward. Episode by episode, the characters form closer and closer relationships with each other. While there is a distinct contrast between many of the characters, they all share a will to live their lives in freedom.

3.2 Categorization

There are of course a number of possible approaches when doing a study such as this. However, I found that the most appropriate way to go about it was to identify all instances of flouting and divide them into categories based on which maxim was flouted. Furthermore, all instances of flouting were also assigned a name based on the character who uttered the phrase. This approach made it easy to determine which maxim was most commonly flouted and which character contributed the most flouts.

In order to identify instances of flouting, the dialogue in three episodes was carefully examined. Each individual flout was also examined in detail in order to determine which maxim was flouted and what the implicature of that flout was. Each episode was watched and re-watched many times in order to make sure that each segment of dialogue was fully examined and all flouts were counted. I also decided to ignore the scripts and chose to only look at the actual episodes. This was done for a number of reasons. First of all, the public scripts that can be found on the internet come in many different forms. Since it is often unclear if the scripts found on the internet are transcribed or reprinted, they are not a reliable source to use. Secondly, the delivery of an utterance is of importance for how the listener (or audience) perceives it. In some cases, it is close to impossible to determine what the actual meaning of an utterance is by only examining the words. This can be shown in the following example:

(10) A: I am going to climb Mount Everest.
B: Good luck bro!
In (10), B's answer might very well be sincere and he is genuinely wishing A good luck. However, another very plausible interpretation of B's answer is that he is being sarcastic. Furthermore, how the line was written and how it was finally delivered can also differ. Actors commonly improvise and are often encouraged to do so. By only looking at the scripts, such instances of improvisation that might include flouting will be lost.

When looking at the dialogue, it might be hard to determine which maxim is being flouted. The guidelines that were used when categorizing the flouts are presented below.

Flouting that exploits the maxim of quality occurs when the speaker is saying something that is overtly untrue or for which he or she lacks adequate evidence (Thomas 1995:67).

(11)  **Tommy is standing on the side of a road. It is raining and big pools of water have formed on the road. A car drives past him and splashes water all over his new coat.**

      Tommy: Perfect, that is just what I needed.

It is obvious that Tommy does not need to get splashed by a car, nor does he think that it was perfect. It can therefore be concluded that the implied meaning of his response is that he is irritated.

Flouting that exploits the maxim of quantity occurs when the speaker is overtly giving too much or too little information (Thomas 1995:69).

(12)  **Julia:** Did you clean your room and the hallway?

      **Amanda:** I cleaned my room.

There must be a reason why Amanda does not fully answer Julia's question. Since we can conclude that her incomplete response was not due to an inability to give a satisfying answer, she must be flouting the maxim of quantity. The implied meaning of her answer is therefore that she did not clean the hallway.

The maxim of relation is flouted when the speaker is giving a response that is not relevant to the situation or topic at hand (Thomas 1995:70).

(13)  **Steve:** So what do you think about the increasing tension in the Middle East?

      **Paul:** More wine anyone?

It is clear that Paul is giving an answer which is not relevant to the question that is asked. It can therefore be concluded that the implied meaning of his response is that he does not wish to participate in the current topic.

Lastly, the maxim of manner is flouted when the speaker is overtly obscure, ambiguous, gives long-winded answers or is blatantly refusing to be orderly (Thomas 1995:71).
(14) Reporter: Is it true that European troops in the middle-east is the probable cause of the riot?
    Official: While I can't confirm anything at this point, I would not try to steer you away from that conclusion.

The response given by the official is long-winded and convoluted. However, it is not intended to be unhelpful and it can therefore be concluded that the response is a flout of the maxim of manner. The implied meaning is that while the official cannot officially confirm anything, the response is still a hint to the reporter that his conclusion is correct.

3.2.1 Problems of categorization

When identifying flouts by using Grice's theories, in some instances it becomes clear that using his theories for the research is not without its problems. Most of his theories as well as the examples that have previously been discussed are based on the fact that interlocutors will understand each other. This is obviously not always the case, since misunderstandings in conversations are common.

The first and probably the most common problem is to identify when a non-observance can be considered a flout. The complication arises when it is not obvious whether or not the listener is aware of the flout. If the listener is oblivious to the implied meaning of the utterance, he or she will not look for it and the flout will be unsuccessful. At times, it might also be difficult for the audience to know if the utterance is intended to flout a maxim or if it is another kind of non-observance such as a violation.

Since sarcasm is a common result of flouts, it might be prudent to define what sarcasm really is. While sarcasm is often used to mock or humiliate someone, this is not always the case. Commonly, sarcastic utterances often include exaggerations and are often a way of making statements without actually saying them out loud. However, these utterances are not always intended to mock or humiliate someone. Sarcasm can also be used to emphasize the irony in a situation or lighten the mood. For example, someone who tries to ride a unicycle might fall and say; “That went well”. In this example, the person is obviously being sarcastic. Since there are so many different ways to use sarcasm, sarcasm is defined here to include all sorts of utterances which include bitter remarks or taunts, no matter what the intention of the utterances might be.

Another common result of flouting is metaphors. The Oxford English dictionary defines a metaphor as a figure of speech in which a name, descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action that is different from, but still analogous to what which it is literally applicable to. In other words, a metaphor occurs when one word is used in place of another word or phrase, e.g. Life is a hurricane. The word hurricane is used for rhetorical effect, and to describe the struggles in life. It may often be important to differentiate between a metaphor and a simile. A simile always
compares something to something else by using words such as like or as, e.g. Life is like a hurricane. A metaphor, however, directly equates them. In this paper, the standard definition of metaphor is used and does therefore not include similes.

Another notable problem is that many utterances flout more than one maxim, which makes them hard to categorize. It might also be difficult to determine which maxims are actually being flouted. For example, it can be hard to determine which maxim is being flouted when an utterance is both obscure and irrelevant, or if it is both long-winded and contains unnecessary information. In such situations, it is often the case that more than one maxim is flouted but the implicature that arises might only be tied to one specific maxim, or at least, have a closer relation to one maxim.

Finally, since the aim of this paper is not simply to identify flouts in scripted speech, but also to determine what kind of implicature arises from them, there is of course a problem in determining the implied meaning of utterances. It is not always clear what the implicature of an utterance is, since conversational implicatures are context-dependent and are not attached to specific words by convention. Furthermore, an implicature may be obvious to the audience but not to the listener in a conversation and the response might therefore be based on a completely different assumption.

Because of these problems, it is important to have some sort of guidelines for how to identify and categorize flouts and implicatures. Therefore, this study is based on the premise that the audience is a silent part of the conversation. This means that in order for an utterance to be considered a flout, the flout needs to be obvious to the audience but not necessarily to the listener. There are a couple of reasons for this. First of all, the characters can sometimes think out loud when they are alone or the thoughts of the characters can be heard by the audience but not by anyone else. In these situations, the dialogue is directed towards the audience. Secondly, it can sometimes be the case that while a character is too stupid to understand a flout, the audience is not. For these reasons, there are occurrences of flouting that are only obvious to the viewer that should be taken into account as well. Furthermore, the implicature that is generated will be based on the most obvious assumption that the viewer makes. If there seems to be two or more plausible implicatures, both will be included and discussed. Finally, in order to count how many times each maxim is flouted, only the maxim that carries the implicature will be counted in each utterance. If two or more maxims are responsible for the implicature, all maxims will be counted.

4. Analysis and results

In this section, the results of the study will be presented. In subsection 4.1, the quantitative results of the study are presented, i.e. the total number of flouts, the number of times each maxim was flouted and the number of flouts from each character. In subsection 4.2 there is a detailed
presentation of the flouts used by different characters and the effects that the flouts have on the audience. Finally, subsection 4.3 contains a brief discussion of the results.

4.1 Quantitative Results

As mentioned in section 1, the material for this study was three episodes of the television series *Firefly*. The first episode was a pilot and actually consists of two consecutive episodes. The average length of each episode is about 40 minutes, which in total sums up to about 2 hours and 40 minutes of material. A total of 142 instances of flouting were identified in a total of 125 utterances. The frequency of flouts varied considerably between episodes but also within each episode. The first episode had a total of 65 flouts, the second episode had a total of 35 flouts and the third episode had only 25 flouts. Moreover, some maxims were flouted more than others as can be seen in Figure 1.

While the number of flouts is fairly evenly distributed between the maxims of quantity, relation and manner, the maxim of quality is by far the most flouted. Furthermore, I also identified 17 instances of flouting where the implicature arises from flouting more than one maxim. In these instances, each flouted maxim is counted.

![Figure 1. Number of flouts and distribution of maxims in three episodes of *Firefly*](image)

When looking at which characters performed flouts, there was a surprising result. Since previous studies have shown that flouting is commonly used to create comedy, one would probably expect flouting to be used in a similar manner in this series. While comedy is not the main genre for the show, it still has some moments of comedy. For example, the character Wash is introduced to the audience in a scene where he is playing with some toy dinosaurs while narrating. It quickly
becomes obvious that Wash is supposed to be the funny one in the group. With this in mind, it is very surprising that it is actually Malcolm that had by far the largest amount of flouts. Since he is the main protagonist of the show, it may not be surprising that he also has the most screen-time, which is of course an important factor. However, as can be seen in Figure 2, with the exception of River and Simon, the flouts are fairly evenly distributed between the other characters. While it may be hard to determine a reason as to why the distribution of flouts is so uneven between Malcolm and the rest of the crew, possible factors are discussed in section 4.2.1.

Figure 2. Number of flouts from each character in three episodes of Firefly

While there are obviously many instances where flouting is used for comic relief, it was found that flouting is also cleverly used for other reasons such as metaphors, being discretion or for dramatic effect. The different implicatures and the effects they have on the viewer are discussed in subsections 4.2.1–4.2.9.

4.2 Characters' use of flouts

In this section, each character is looked at in detail. In the analysis of each character, I will explore the different flouts used by them and look at the implicatures and effects that arise. The aim here is not only to explore what kind of flouts are used by the characters, but also what the effect of those flouts are on the audience. Since Malcolm is the character with the largest number of flouts,
subsection 4.2.1 is given most space.

4.2.1 Malcolm
Malcolm is by far the character with the most instances of flouts. In the three episodes included in this study he has a total of 46 flouts where 8 of those flouts exploit more than one maxim. The maxim of quality is flouted 22 times, the maxim of quantity is flouted 8 times, and the maxims of relation and manner are flouted 12 times each.

While sarcasm is often the result of flouts from Malcolm, it is not used for comedy as much as it is used to sound less harsh. Malcolm is first introduced to the audience in a war setting. At this point, he is a sergeant in the independent army and he is leading a charge on the enemy. Since he becomes the captain of Serenity, he is always a person of authority. This means that he is the one giving orders, and he is constantly using sarcasm to soften his utterances. This is a clever way of portraying the character as a leader, while still creating humour that the audience can relate to. A good example of this can be seen in (15) where Malcolm, Jayne and Kaylee are talking about picking up passengers on a planet where they are going to stop to resupply. When Malcolm confirms that they are picking up passengers, Kaylee becomes excited and smiles.

(15) Jayne: Captain, can you stop Kaylee from being cheerful please.
Malcolm: I don't believe there's a power in the verse to stop Kaylee from being cheerful. **Sometimes you just wanna duct-tape her mouth and dump her in the hole for a month.**
Kaylee: I love my captain.

This is obviously a flout of the maxim of quality since Malcolm does not really want to dump Kaylee in a hole for a month. The flouting is also noticed by Kaylee, which becomes obvious when she responds. The implicature that arises from Malcolm's flout is hard to determine, but a likely interpretation is that he is saying that Kaylee can be a bit loud when she is cheerful. Moreover, since the sarcastic remark made by Malcolm probably would not induce laughter in most viewers, there must be some other reason for the utterance. As previously suggested, the reason for the flout is not for comedy as much as it is a way of portraying the character as having a sense of humour. Moreover, this is also a way for Malcolm to express fondness for Kaylee. Their relationship to each other is part of why Kaylee understands the implicated meaning of the utterance.

Malcolm also often uses metaphors. This quality adds a great deal to the character, but mainly it gives him depth and makes his language more interesting. He uses these metaphors in all kinds of situations. Sometimes the intention is to phrase something in a more interesting way as can be seen in example (16).
Malcolm: **Bendez, give us some cover-fire we're going duck hunting.**

As stated in section 3.2.1, metaphorical language in this study counts as flouts of the maxim of quality, as metaphors express meanings which are not literally true. Since they are in the middle of a fire fight, it seems unlikely that they are going to hunt ducks. It therefore becomes obvious that this is a metaphor for something else. The implicature of this metaphor is that they are going to attack the enemy in some way. Malcolm could just as easily have said that they are going to attack, but phrasing it the way that he did made the utterance a bit more interesting. Other times, he almost sounds a bit poetic when he uses a metaphor which adds another interesting layer to the character.

Inara: You're lost in the woods, we all are, even the captain. The only difference is he likes it that way.

Malcolm: **No, the only difference is, the woods are the only place I can see a clear path.**

In (17), Inara talks to Simon and uses a metaphor to explain the situation that they are in. Malcolm then enters the room and he expands on that same metaphor and gives it further meaning. While there is no obvious implicature that arises from this metaphor, a likely interpretation is that Malcolm is trying to say that he wants to live off the radar because that is the only place where he can move forward without interference. The fact that the meaning of the utterance is not obvious is what makes it interesting and gives the character some depth. While some character traits are obvious to the viewer, there is still some mystery given to the character by the use of these metaphors.

Malcolm also flouts the maxim of relation several times. While there are various implicatures that arise from such flouts, one effect that some of them appear to have is to display Malcolm’s sense of humour. In the following example, Jayne, Malcolm and Zoey are preparing for a meeting. Jayne has brought a couple of transmitters (or radios) that will be used to communicate.

Jayne: Testing... testing, captain can you hear me?
Malcolm: **I'm standing right here.**
Jayne: You're coming through good and loud.
Malcolm: Because I'm standing right here.

In this scene, all three of them are standing on top of a hill right next to each other. Malcolm's response seen on a surface level seems to be non-co-operative, since he does not answer Jayne's yes- or no-question. However, his answer is stating something obvious since both Jayne and Zoey can see him standing right next to them and must therefore be meaningful in some other way. The implicature from Malcolm's response is therefore that he obviously can hear Jayne since they are
standing right next to each other. In this case, the effect is humorous.

The maxim of manner is flouted for different purposes, but commonly it is flouted when the characters are overly brief, which makes the utterance somewhat obscure. However, in these situations the context as well as the way the phrase is uttered help to give rise to the implicature, which is why it can be identified as a flout instead of a violation.

(19) Malcolm: **Zoey?**  
Zoey: Armour's dented.

In this example it is the way that Malcolm says the phrase that makes the flouting obvious. Malcolm says Zoey's name with a rising intonation at the end, which makes it clear that he is asking her something. However, even though the flout is obvious through the way that Malcolm says Zoey's name, the implicature arises from the situation that they are in. Malcolm and Zoey have just been in a fire fight which has now come to an end. The fact that Zoey was also shot during the fight makes it obvious to both Zoey and the viewer that Malcolm is actually asking Zoey if she is all right.

Finally, the maxim of quantity is flouted for a number of different purposes such as making threats, humorous remarks, or making statements. In the following example, a federal marshal has a gun pointed at Malcolm. Furthermore, the marshal is threatening to arrest everyone on the ship.

(20) Federal Marshal: I got a cruiser en route for intercept so talk all you want. You got about 20 minutes.  
Malcolm: **Might have less than that.**  
Federal Marshal: Yeah, threaten me.

First of all, Malcolm is flouting the maxim of quantity by saying less than required. However, the context gives rise to the implicature which makes the flout obvious. In this case, the flout is meant to be a threat where Malcolm is implying that he will kill the marshal if he does not put the gun down. In this case, the implicature is obvious to both the viewer and the marshal.

It is obvious that Malcolm flouts the different maxims for various purposes. It is next to impossible to tie specific effects to specific maxims since each maxim is used differently in each flout. For example, all the different maxims are used at least once for some sort of comic effect. However, it becomes clear that Malcolm uses a lot of flouts, which is in itself an interesting discovery. While Malcolm is the main protagonist of the show and thus has the most screen-time, it seems unlikely that this is the only reason as to why he flouts the most. More likely, the frequent use of flouts and the different effects that they create adds layers to the character which in turn makes him more mysterious and interesting. This is a way of cleverly using the space given by a
television series for character development. The aim for this is to slowly peel off these layers over
the course of the series. By doing so, the character is slowly developed which in turn engages the
viewer's interest. In other words, this is a trick that scriptwriters use to attract viewers. As discussed
in section 3.1, the series does not really have a story with a beginning and an end. It is more
character driven and it is the developing characters and their individual stories that keep the viewer
interested.

4.2.2 Zoey

Zoey does not have nearly as many instances of flouting as Malcolm, but she still flouts the maxims
15 times in the three episodes included in the study. Even though Zoey flouts all the maxims at least
once, the maxim of quality is by far the most flouted with a total of 8 flouts. Furthermore, Zoey
flouts the maxim of quantity 2 times, the maxim of relation 4 times and the maxim of manner once.
Even though some of her utterances flouted more than one maxim, only one maxim is involved in
the implicature, which is why she did not have any identified instances of flouts that exploited more
than one maxim.

In contrast to Malcolm, Zoey's flouts commonly have similar effects. In the eight instances
where the maxim of quality is flouted, seven are used for sarcasm. However, just like Malcolm, she
does not use sarcasm to appear funny or induce laughter. Instead, the sarcastic remarks that she
makes just add a little flare to the character in that it creates a very specific way for her to talk, i.e.
she is often sarcastic. Just like Malcolm, Zoey is a war veteran and is often portrayed as a tough
soldier. Her way of talking a bit sarcastically actually complements this portrayal in that it gives her
a lighter and softer side, making her a bit more likeable. Furthermore, since she is also the wife of
Wash, this softer side creates a more believable character. An example of the type of sarcastic
remarks that Zoey makes can be seen in (21).

(21) Malcolm: This is why we lost you know, superior numbers.
Zoey: Thanks for the re-enactment sir.

In (21) Zoey, Malcolm and Jayne have just been chased out of a bar after a fight. Malcolm's
utterance is referring to the war that both he and Zoey fought in. Zoey's response is sarcastic
because it is illogical for her to thank him, since they lost the war. The implicature that her utterance
generates is also tied to the fact that the bar fight was started by Malcolm. Her response is therefore
a way for her to express ingratitude towards Malcolm. Instead of saying out loud that she is angry at
Malcolm for dragging her into a fight that he started, she uses sarcasm to only imply it.

Zoey flouts the maxim of quantity twice and the effects are different in each of them. In one of
them, she is making a statement that is indirectly relevant to the context, and in the other she is making a threat without actually saying it out loud, i.e. she says less than required.

(22) Simon: Do you know what a stomach wound does to a person?
Malcolm: Surely do.
Simon: Then you know how crucial the next few minutes are.
Zoey: **You let her die, you'll never make it to the feds.**

In this example, Kaylee has been shot in the stomach and Malcolm is bargaining with Simon to save her life. An alliance cruiser is closing in on them and Simon, who is a fugitive, wants them to try to escape. He tries to bargain with Malcolm by refusing to save Kaylee's life if they do not try to flee. Zoey's remark is a threat to Simon where she is implying that she is going to kill him if he does not save Kaylee's life.

The maxim of relation is flouted by Zoey when she makes statements or answers questions that indirectly have some sort of relevance. As previously discussed, in (19) Malcolm is asking Zoey if she is alright. However, instead of answering with a yes or no, she makes a statement that indirectly has significance. Since she recognises the flout made by Malcolm, she replies with a flout of her own, namely that her armour is dented. The generated implicature tells Malcolm that she is alright even though she was shot.

Finally, the maxim of manner is flouted only once by Zoey. In the following example, Malcolm and Zoey are about to steal some cargo from a train. However, once they are on the train they find out that there is an entire squad of federal marshals in one of the train carts.

(23) Zoey: Sir, is there some information we might maybe be lacking as to why there's an entire fed squad sitting on this train?
Malcolm: Doesn't concern us.
Zoey: **It kinda concerns me.**

First of all, what Malcolm is saying is that the squad of federal marshals are not there to protect the cargo and therefore they must be there for another reason. However, Zoey's response is ambiguous since it can be interpreted in two ways. This is of course made purposely, since Malcolm does not seem to be worried at all. The flout is made because of the ambiguity of the word *concern* i.e. 'being worried' or 'that something has to do with something else'.

4.2.3 Wash

Even though Wash is portrayed as the funny one in the group, he does not flout the maxims as frequently as some of the other crew members. However, eleven utterances that used flouts were
identified over the three episodes. The maxim of quality was flouted the most and made up six instances. The maxim of quantity was flouted three times, the maxim of relation was flouted twice and the maxim of manner was flouted once. One flout also exploited more than one maxim and in this case, both maxims were counted.

Even though flouting can be used effectively to create comedy, Wash often uses other means to be humorous. Just like many of the other characters, he uses sarcasm from time to time, which exploits the maxim of quality. In all the identified utterances where the maxim of quality was flouted, the effect was sarcasm. In (24), Serenity is just about to land on a planet. Malcolm, Zoey and Wash are up on the flight bridge as Wash is flying the plane into the atmosphere.

(24) Zoey: Planet's coming up a mite fast.
Wash: That's just cause I'm goin down too quick. Likely crash and kill us all.

Just before entering the atmosphere, Zoey and Wash are gazing on the beautiful sun that is setting behind the planet. Suddenly the ship starts to shake a bit and that is when Zoey tells Wash that they are coming in a bit fast. However, since Wash's response is sarcastic the implicature tells Zoey and Malcolm that it is fine and nothing to worry about.

Wash also flouts the maxim of quantity three times. All three of these instances were found in the first episode and twice the flout is used for dramatic effect. In contrast, the third time he utters the flout in a very dramatic situation to ease the tension a bit. This is a clever way of portraying him as calm in a desperate situation. In the scene, the characters are being chased by monsters called Reavers. Everyone else is fairly uneasy, but Wash tries to stay calm since he is flying the ship. However, in (25) the pressure is not really on Wash and therefore the flout is used to heighten the intensity of the drama a bit.

(25) In this scene, a federal marshal who was imprisoned in one of the ship's passenger cells has just escaped. Wash is up on the flight bridge when an alarm goes off and he looks down on a screen.
Wash: No don't, don't you dare.

Clearly, Wash is saying less than required for the audience to understand his utterance on a semantic level and since he is in fact alone on the bridge, the viewer can conclude that the utterance is intended to be directed at the audience. The implicature arises from the context. The fact that the marshal has just escaped gives the viewer the necessary information to understand the implicature.

The maxim of relation is flouted twice and both times Wash says something seemingly unrelated to make some sort of point. In the following example, Malcolm and Zoey are behind schedule and the rest of the crew is waiting on the ship. However, they are also supposed to contact Niska, their
employer, who is waiting for them and this puts them in a bit of a dilemma.

(26)  Jayne: Niska's people are waiting, they're not partial to waiting.
      Wash: Let them read a magazine, we don't make the sale until Mal and Zoey are back on the boat.

This flout may actually be seen as exploiting more than just the maxim of relation. However, the implicature arises from the maxim of relation, since the implied meaning of the utterance is that Wash does not care that Niska's people are waiting for them. The fact that people in waiting rooms frequently read magazines makes the flout obvious.

The maxim of manner is only flouted once by Wash and it occurs together with a flout of the maxim of quantity. In the previously discussed scene where Wash tries to stay calm in the face of danger, he uses an utterance which can be seen to exploit both or either the quantity and/or the manner maxim.

(27)  Malcolm: How close are they?
      Wash: About 20 seconds from spitting distance.

Wash's answer to Malcolm's question is really obscure, since it does not really specify a precise distance. Therefore, it is obviously a flouting of the maxim of manner. However, it is also a flouting of the maxim of quantity since Wash is not really providing enough information. Whichever the case, the generated implicature tells Malcolm that they are fairly close.

4.2.4 Inara

In contrast to many of the other characters, Inara does not flout the maxim of quality the most. In fact, the distribution of flouts between the maxims is fairly even. There are 12 identified instances of flouting from Inara over the three episodes. Three times she flouts the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity is flouted five times, the maxim of relation three times and the maxim of manner is flouted four times.

Even though Inara uses sarcasm just like the other characters, these instances are very rare, even in the other episodes in the series. Instead, her flouts that exploit the maxim of quality are often due to her use of metaphors as can be seen in (17). This way of talking makes her speech very distinct and showcases her as an educated woman. Furthermore, she also has three instances of flouting that exploit more than one maxim. One of these instances is shown in (28). In this scene Malcolm walks into Inara's shuttle unannounced.
Inara: What did I say to you about barging into my shuttle?
Malcolm: That it was manly and impulsive.
Inara: Yes precisely, only the exact phrase I used was “don't”.

Inara's utterance flouts the maxim of quality, since she obviously has not said what Malcolm is claiming. It also flouts the maxim of quantity, since the utterance gives a bit more information than required. It can even be said to flout the maxim of manner, since the utterance is a bit long-winded, which is unnecessary in the situation. Whichever the case, the implicature that is generated tells Malcolm that he cannot come and go into Inara's shuttle whenever he wants to.

Inara and Malcolm are constantly bickering and fighting and in these situations, Inara often uses flouts that exploit the maxims of manner and quantity. In (29) Inara has just been introduced to Shepherd Book and Malcolm has just told him that she is a whore. Kaylee, who is also present in this scene, is correcting Malcolm.

Kaylee: The term is companion.
Malcolm: I always get those mixed up. How's business?
Inara: None of yours.

When Malcolm is asking Inara how business is going, her answer exploits the ambiguity of the word *business* i.e. 'an enterprise' or 'a concern'. The obvious ambiguity of the word gives rise to the implicature which tells Malcolm that that is none of his concern.

The maxim of relation is flouted by Inara three times and the effects of these flouts differ. In the following example, Inara is at a formal party with a client and they are discussing the other men in the room.

Atherton: All of them wish they were in your bed.
Inara: *I'm looking for the boy with the shimmering wine.*

Inara finds Atherton's remark a bit rude and inappropriate. Her way of saying something completely unrelated is signalling that she is uncomfortable and wishes to change the topic of conversation. The generated implicature is further amplified by her facial expression and the fact that she turns away from Atherton.

4.2.5 Jayne

Jayne is portrayed as a sort of big and dumb mercenary and his role in the group is to be the muscles. He is also often very rude and commonly gives insults of some sort. Keeping this in mind, it is not surprising that most of his flouts have sarcastic effects. The study found twelve instances of flouting from Jayne, where eight of them are flouts that exploit the maxim of quality, most of which
have a sarcastic effect. The maxim of quantity is flouted twice, and the maxim of relation is flouted three times. The maxim of manner was never flouted by Jayne. Furthermore, one of the flouts exploited more than one maxim. In (31), Jayne, Malcolm and Zoey are preparing for a meeting and are standing on the top of a hill. Malcolm is planning to use Jayne as a sniper in case anything goes wrong.

(31) Malcolm: Feel like taking a walk around the park?
Jayne: Sure you don't wanna piss yourself and back down like you did with Badger.

In this example, Malcolm is actually telling Jayne to go to higher ground and take out the snipers that are probably already in place. Jayne's response is a flout that exploits at least three maxims, maybe even all four. First of all, the maxim of quality is exploited by the fact that Jayne says that Malcolm “pissed himself” in the meeting with Badger, which Malcolm did not do. Secondly, the maxim of quantity is exploited, since he is providing more information than required. The maxim of relation is flouted, since Malcolm is asking a yes-or-no question and Jayne is answering with another question which seems to have no relevance on a surface level. The implied meaning of Jayne's phrase is actually that he thinks Malcolm was a bit of a coward to back down in the meeting with Badger and he is questioning if that is going to happen again. It could also be argued that Jayne is flouting the maxim of manner since his response is a bit long-winded. However, only the maxims of quality, quantity and relation were counted in this instance.

Just like most flouts from Jayne, flouts that exploit the maxims of quantity and relation are usually used for insults or just acting rude. In (32) the crew is in the middle of a train heist and Jayne is supposed to be lowered down from the ship on top of the train to pick up the stolen cargo. In this scene, Kaylee and Simon are talking in the cargo bay while preparing to lower Jayne onto the train.

(32) Simon: Well uh... is there anything I can... something I should be doing?
Jayne: Staying the hell out of everyone's way.
Kaylee: There's no call to be snappy Jayne.
Jayne: Are you about to move onto a moving train?

As Jayne enters the room, he is rude to Simon, which is why Kaylee is trying to defend him by saying that there is no call to be rude. Jayne's response is a flout of the maxim of relation, since the implicature tells Kaylee that he is snappy because he is about to jump onto a moving train. However, the way that the phrase is uttered is also a bit rude, which is of course not uncommon for Jayne.

Jayne's brutish personality is well complemented with the frequent flouts that are commonly
used to insult people. Just like many of the other characters, the flouts add a specific characteristic trait to the character. This is a clever way of emphasizing each character's uniqueness.

4.2.6 Kaylee
Kaylee, the down-to-earth mechanic, uses flouts in her speech in various ways and it is hard to find specific patterns. In total, eleven instances of flouting were identified from Kaylee. Just like many of the other characters, she flouts the maxim of quality the most with a total of five times. However, in contrast to the others, these flouts are not used for sarcasm as much as for making jokes or metaphors. The maxims of quantity and relation are flouted three times each and the maxim of manner is flouted twice. Furthermore, two utterances also flouted more than one maxim.

The maxim of quality is flouted by Kaylee for various reasons. She does not really use sarcasm much, especially not when compared to the other characters. Instead, the maxim of quality is flouted a couple of times when she uses metaphors. The following example shows one such instance. In the scene, Kaylee is injured and is unable to do her job on her own. Therefore, Shepherd helps her while she sits on the floor and gives directions.

(33) Kaylee: You know where the press regulator is?
Kaylee points Shepherd in the right direction.
Kaylee: Head of the class.

In (33), Kaylee's second utterance is both irrelevant as well as a lie. Therefore, one can conclude that she is using a metaphor. The implicature in this case is that she thinks Shepherd is doing a good job. However, the implicature is tied to both the maxim of relation as well as the maxim of quality, since both of these work together to generate the implicature.

The maxim of quantity is flouted only a few times by Kaylee. The way that the flout is used is very different each time and there does not seem to be a specific pattern. In (34) Simon and Shepherd have just boarded the ship and Malcolm is giving a quick briefing in the dining area.

(34) Malcolm: You're a shepherd?
Shepherd: Thought the outfit gave it away. Is it a problem?
Kaylee: Of course not! It's no problem, cause it's not.

While this can easily be identified as a flout, it is certainly not easy to determine exactly what that flout is. Whichever the case, the maxim of quantity seems to be flouted since she does not really give a reason for why there is no problem. On the other hand, she could also have stopped talking after her first sentence as that would have given the same amount of information, simply that there is no problem. Therefore, she arguably also flouts the maxim of manner since her second sentence
is obscure. Either way, the generated implicature tells the viewer that Malcolm in fact does have a problem with the fact that Shepherd is a priest but at the same time it is a problem that he can live with.

Kaylee is a very kind girl. She is rarely rude to people or gets into conflicts with the rest of the crew. Even when she makes requests or gives blame, she does so by using a flout to give the utterance a milder tone and sound less harsh. In (35) Inara is combing Kaylee's hair in her shuttle when Malcolm walks into the room and starts scolding Kaylee for the mess that she has made in the engine room.

(35) Malcolm: Kaylee, what the hell's going on in the engine room? Were there monkeys? Some terrifying space monkeys maybe got loose?
Kaylee: I had to rewire the grav thrust because somebody won't replace the crappy compression coil.

Instead of blaming it on Malcolm directly by saying that he is the one who will not replace the compression coil, she does so indirectly, implying it with the use of *somebody*. This very obvious example of a flouting of the maxim of manner is a fairly common way for Kaylee to talk. She always tries to avoid conflict and she is often trying to calm situations down to make sure that the others in the crew do not fight either.

### 4.2.7 Simon

Merely five instances of flouting from Simon were identified. The maxims of quality, quantity and relation were flouted once each and the maxim of manner was flouted twice. One of the flouts also exploited more than one maxim. Simon usually talks in a very direct and mannered way. He comes from a family of high social class and as such, his way of speaking is very different to that of the others, with the exception of Inara who is also a highly educated woman. In contrast to the others he does not really use indirect phrasings or sarcasm, with a few exceptions. An interesting fact is that almost all of the identified flouts were directly or indirectly connected to his sister River in some way. Two of his flouts were used when he was talking to her and two of them when she was close by and he was trying not to upset her.

In the following scene, Simon is putting River to bed. It is important to keep in mind that Simon was the one who rescued River from the academy.

(36) River: I didn't think you'd come for me.
Simon: Well you're a dummy.

Since River is a prodigy and obviously not a dummy, this is a flout that exploits the maxim of
quality. Simon is implying that there was no way that he would not come to her rescue.

To Simon, River is like a child and he often talks to her in the same way that a parent talks to a child. She is often nervous and scared that the government will find her and take her back to the academy. Therefore, Simon is doing his best to not upset her. In the following scene, Malcolm enters the infirmary after a bar fight with a minor injury. Since River is also in the room, Simon is trying to keep her calm.

(37) Simon: **So the uh... the fight didn't draw any uh... any attention?**

Since Simon does not know what Malcolm is going to answer, he is trying to be discreet. If in fact the fight would have drawn the attention of federal marshals, Simon does not want River to know that in case she would be upset. Therefore, he is deliberately making his question obscure in the same way parents would if trying to be discreet in front of children.

### 4.2.8 River

Just like her brother Simon, River does not use a lot of flouts, mainly because she has been the subject of horrible experiments, which have left her with permanent brain damage. In fact, it is revealed in a later episode that her amygdala has been removed. This is the part of the brain that is responsible for keeping one's emotions in check. Because of this severe trauma she has no control over her emotions and most of her speech is incoherent. Although there are a few instances of flouting from River, most of her speech violates or infringes on the maxims rather than flouts them. She flouts the maxims four times, and two of these instances are flouts of the maxim of manner. The maxims of quantity and relation are also flouted once each. At times it can be very hard to know if she is flouting or if she is simply violating the maxims, since she often talks about matters that are irrelevant to the situation.

In the following scene Simon and River are in the infirmary when River wakes up from a dream. She is clearly upset by the dream that she had and Simon is trying to calm her down.

(38) Simon: Did you dream about the academy?
River: It's not relevant.
Simon: If you can talk about what happened there. I know it's hard but the more I know the faster you'll get better.
River: **This isn't home.**

River seems to be stating something very obvious and at the same time irrelevant to the situation. However, what she is arguably trying to imply is that she wants to go home because that is where
she would feel safe. As mentioned earlier, her speech is often incoherent and strange and is often hard to make sense of.

4.2.9 Shepherd

Nine flouts by Shepherd were identified. The maxim of quality is flouted only once. The maxim of quantity is flouted twice and the maxims of relation and manner are flouted four times each. Moreover, two of the flouts exploited more than one maxim.

In (39) Shepherd and Kaylee have just met for the first time and are discussing whether he is going to fly on board Serenity or not. When they are discussing payment, Shepherd shows Kaylee a small box of strawberries. An important point to make here is that the audience has previously witnessed Shepherd being called a grandpa because of his age to which he replies; “I never married.” In that scene, the man he is talking to does not understand what he means and it only becomes obvious when Shepherd explains that he is not a grandpa.

(39) Kaylee: Oh, grandpa...
Shepherd: I never married.

Since the phrase was given as an explanation in a previous scene, the second time it is uttered it can be counted as a flout, since it is immediately understood by the viewer. This seemingly irrelevant phrase flouts the maxim of relation with the same implicature as the first time.

The next example is taken from a scene where Shepherd is asking Malcolm why he took Simon and River on board even after finding out that they are fugitives.

(40) Malcolm: Same reason I took you on board Shepherd, I need the fair.
Shepherd: Ha ha, there's neither of us can pay a tenth of what your crew makes on one of your “jobs”.

The intonation and stress on the word jobs suggests that Shepherd is trying to imply something. The phrase can therefore be seen to flout the maxim of manner, since he is deliberately being obscure. However, the generated implicature is quickly understood as he refers to the crew's illegal activities when he talks about their jobs.

4.3 Discussion of results

In this study, 142 instances of flouting were identified in three episodes of the television series Firefly. Although many of the flouts were used for similar effects, there was a large variety in the types of flouts used and the implicatures that they created. The maxim of quality was flouted the
most and had a total of 54 instances, which was twice as many the maxim of quantity with 27 instances. The maxim of relation was flouted 33 times and the maxim of manner was flouted 28 times.

First and foremost, most of the flouts are used to bring out specific characteristics in each character. While it has been shown that flouts can be used to create comedy in studies such as “Linguistic basis of humor in uses of Grice's cooperation principle” (Weiwei 2012), flouts can also be used for other effects. In Firefly the different characters use flouts for such effects as sarcasm, making threats, metaphors or giving insults. The uniqueness in each character is further emphasized by the way that they talk. Since the crew on board the ship is quite large, it becomes even more important to make each character unique, especially considering that the show is supposed to be character-driven as opposed to story-driven.

The flouts exploiting the maxim of quality had various effects and were used to various degrees. Most of these flouts were used for sarcasm. However, some characters used sarcasm rarely or never at all. The characters who used sarcasm the most frequently were Malcolm, Zoey and Jayne. This is somewhat surprising, since Wash is supposed to be the funny one in the group. A fairly logical reason is that sarcasm is not really used for comedy in the show as much as it is used to give insults. Although insults can very well be amusing, this is usually not the case here. Instead, comedy is created in the series by other means such as specific situations that the characters find themselves in or phrasing things differently without using flouts.

The maxim of quality was also commonly exploited when the characters used metaphors. Practically all metaphors exploit the maxim of quality since the speaker is saying that something is actually something else, or gives a word new meaning by using it differently. An example of this can be seen in (17). The characters who used metaphors the most frequently were Malcolm and Inara. Some of the other characters used a metaphor once or twice, like Kaylee, which can be seen in (33). It seems that the reason why Inara uses metaphors is her background. Her education as a companion has given her extensive knowledge of poetry, literature and social skills. She has learned to seduce her clients with both her physique as well as her eloquent tongue. When Malcolm uses metaphors, many times he does so very casually. Although he does sound a bit poetical at times, many of his metaphors are commonly used in everyday situations and most people probably would not think about them as metaphors at all. However, Malcolm is sort of like a pirate at sea. He refers to his ship as a boat and he often talks about the sky when they are in fact in space. Furthermore, his only goal in life seems to be total freedom. In a later episode not included in the study, the audience witnesses a flashback from when Malcolm bought Serenity. When he shows the ship to Zoey she is very negative and thinks he paid too much for it. When he talks about the ship he says the following:
Malcolm: Try to see past what she is, and onto what she can be?
Zoey: What's that sir?
Malcolm: Freedom, is what.

Malcolm: Tell you Zoey, we get a mechanic, get her up and running again, hire a good pilot, maybe a cook, live like real people. A small crew, they must feel the need to be free, take jobs as they come. They never have to be under the heel of nobody ever again.

Malcolm's values and goals in life are very well captured in this scene. The scene is further dramatized with accompanying music of a piano. In fact, the music playing in the background is a tool that is cleverly used all the time to control the tempo of a certain scene. If the scene is supposed to be dramatic and intense, then intense, somewhat fast-paced music is playing in the background. When the tempo is supposed to slow down, then the music also slows down. This is of course a trick that has been used in both TV and films for decades, but it is still important to remember.

Flouts of the maxim of quantity are also used for various reasons. Just like the maxim of quality, such flouts are used to make threats, although not as commonly. In these instances, less information than required is given and the speaker only implies the threat, not actually saying anything out loud. This is used mainly by Malcolm and Zoey. Flouts of the maxim of quantity were also commonly used to increase the intensity and drama of a scene. These utterances also provided less information than required. These sort of utterances often imply that something is about to happen, but it is not said out loud what that something is. Finally, the maxim of quantity was also commonly flouted to create some sort of comical remark. Although these utterances may not be inducing laughter, they are clearly meant to provide some light-hearted comedy. The characters who used these kinds of utterances were Malcolm, Inara and Kaylee.

It is hard to draw any conclusion about the flouts that exploited the maxim of relation. These flouts were almost always very different from each other and almost all characters exploited this maxim differently. However, just like the other maxims, the maxim of relation is sometimes flouted for some light-hearted comedy as can be seen in (18). The characters that used these types of flouts most often were Malcolm and Wash. Inara flouts the maxim of relation when she is trying to avoid a subject or when she is uncomfortable. She, Shepherd, and Simon, are the characters that really stand out in the group. The fact that they are the only ones (at least as far as we know) who are educated in the group is certainly shown in the way that they talk. They use sarcasm and slang words very rarely and they do not speak with an accent the way most of the others do. Finally, another common way that the maxim of relation was exploited was when the characters answered questions with statements that seemed unrelated. In most cases, the implicatures of these flouts were fairly easy to understand.

The maxim of manner was most commonly flouted when the characters were trying to avoid
saying something out loud, either because they did not want to sound rude or because they did not want to cause any stress or make anyone scared. As can be seen in (35), Kaylee is trying to refrain from accusing Malcolm of anything, even though they both know that he is responsible. In (40), Shepherd is trying to avoid saying that what Malcolm and his crew is doing is illegal.

While there are a lot of flouts and many of them have been discussed, it is important to remember that all flouts might not have been identified. Some flouts such as metaphors and sarcasm are fairly easy to identify, while other types of flouts are harder to spot. Furthermore, while the effects of the flouts have also been discussed in some detail, there might very well be differences of opinion and interpretation here as well. Furthermore, the intended effects of the flouts might also be different from how they are perceived. It helps to think of it in terms of the co-operation principle. The scriptwriters, director and actors are trying to tell a story. That story is then interpreted by the viewer on the assumption that it will follow a certain set of familiar rules, a sort of story-telling schema. However, just like we have to distinguish between what is said and what is meant, we also have to distinguish between what is showed and how it is interpreted. Each viewer is unique and pays attention to different things. For example, in the first episode Malcolm is kissing a cross in the opening scene, suggesting that he is religious and puts his faith in God. This small detail explains why he ends up resenting God after losing the war and has a problem with the fact that Shepherd is a priest. However, this might very well be overlooked by most viewers, which of course has an effect on how they interpret the characters.

5. Summary and conclusion
The data collected in this paper shows that the maxim of quality is by far the most commonly flouted in the television series Firefly. However, the implicatures generated from these flouts often create a number of different effects. For example, sarcasm can often be the reason why a character uses a flout, but even here the effect that the sarcastic remark may have on the audience varies. In some instances, the sarcastic remark is merely a way of giving an insult and in others it is a way for a character to be humorous or sound less harsh. However, in the data collected for this study, sarcastic remarks always flouted the maxim of quality. Therefore, it can be concluded that the maxim of quality is closely connected to sarcasm. It is, however, important to note that instances of sarcasm can flout other maxims as well. Furthermore, since the maxim of quality was the most commonly flouted, it should come as no surprise that most of the characters had the largest number of flouting instances in that category. However, this was not the case for all the characters. Most notably, Shepherd only flouted the maxim of quality once, but flouted both the maxims of relation and manner four times each. As a viewer, it quickly becomes obvious that Shepherd, Inara and
Simon have different ways of talking. Taking the data collected in this study into consideration, the difference between these three characters and the rest of the crew on board Serenity becomes even more obvious. It can therefore be concluded that, while some flouts may not be exclusive to a specific character, they are certainly more commonly exploited by some characters.

The other three maxims were flouted fairly evenly. The maxim of quantity was flouted 27 times, the maxim of relation was flouted 33 times and the maxim of manner was flouted 28 times. However, just like the maxim of quality, these maxims are flouted for different effects by different characters. For example, the maxim of quantity is commonly flouted by Zoey and Malcolm to make threats. These flouts give less information than required by only implying a threat, not actually saying it out loud. The maxim of relation is also flouted for various effects. However, most commonly, this maxim is flouted to make the characters' speech more interesting. When someone is asked a question, a common response was to give an answer that seemed unrelated and could therefore be understood as a flout.

The character that had the highest number of flouts was Malcolm with a total of 46 flouts. In fact, Malcolm had more than three times as many instances of flouts than any other character. While this may not be surprising due to the fact that he is the main protagonist of the show and has by far the most utterances, there are other reasons for this as well. His way of speaking allows for more instances of flouting, since he is more often sarcastic, uses metaphors and uses flouts to be humorous. In total, eleven of Malcolm’s flouts were due to metaphors, which is about ¼ of his total flouting instances. While these effects are not exclusive to Malcolm’s flouts, they are used more often by him than any other character.

In conclusion, since this study is only based on data from a few episodes in a single television series, it is almost impossible to make any generalizations about which maxim is flouted most commonly. However, the maxims and Grice's cooperation principle help to explain how scriptwriters manage to create drama, mystery and humour through dialogue. While scriptwriters may not create dialogue between characters with Grice's cooperation principle in mind, Grice's work is a tool that can be used to properly describe the dynamics of normal interaction between people. Therefore, the dialogue is not created by using the cooperation principle but rather, it is understood by using it. By applying the tools provided by Grice, one can understand how different effects are achieved through speech and how scriptwriters create unique characteristic traits in each character.

Since Grice’s work can be used to analyse and understand conversational interaction, there are a few interesting ideas for further research. For example, it would be very interesting to see how flouting is used in other genres of television. Since flouting has been shown to occur in comedy, it would be very interesting to see how flouting is used in drama and thriller shows. Another
interesting idea would be to test if the results shown here and in other research papers reflects interaction in real life groups. In other words, find out whether flouting occurs in the same way in conversation between real-life people as it does on television. Finally, it would also be interesting to study if there is a difference in flouting between different age groups.
List of references

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