

Maxims Flouted by The Main Character in Plankton: The Movie

Putu Kharisma Budhiari Sapanca¹, Komang Dian Puspita Candra²

¹Mahasaraswati University Denpasar, Bali

²Mahasaraswati University Denpasar, Bali

¹sapancaharisma@gmail.com, ²dianpuspitacandra@unmas.ac.id

Abstract. This study investigates the flouting of conversational maxims by the main character in *Plankton: The Movie* (2025), an animated film directed by Dave Needham. The research aims to identify the types of maxims flouted and explore the character's motivations for these violations. A descriptive qualitative method was employed to analyze Plankton's utterances using Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), which includes the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Data were collected through careful observation of the film and its transcript, with selected utterances categorized and interpreted using Leech's (1983) theory of Illocutionary Functions of Politeness. The findings reveal 22 instances of maxim flouting, with the maxim of relation being the most frequently violated (31.8%), followed by quality (27.2%), manner (22.7%), and quantity (18.1%). Each violation was shown to serve a specific communicative function, such as expressing frustration, asserting dominance, or rejecting others' viewpoints. These results indicate that maxim flouting in the film is not random but strategically used to shape character identity and support narrative development. This study highlights the relevance of pragmatic analysis in animated films and underscores the role of language manipulation in fictional discourse.

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Corresponding Author: Putu Kharisma Budhiari Sapanca; sapancaharisma@gmail.com



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INTRODUCTION

Language is the foundation of human communication, playing a vital role in daily life. Language serves as the primary tool for conveying ideas, feelings, and emotions, fostering interaction with others (Apriyanto et al., 2020). Communication involves the exchange of messages between a sender and a receiver, helping both parties reach a mutual understanding (Jayantari, 2023). For communication to be successful, the meaning of the message must be clear and agreed upon. Essentially, it is the process of transmitting ideas in a way that ensures shared comprehension between individuals. Conversation is a type of communication in which effectiveness and

relevance are achieved when participants engage in mutual cooperation. Engage meaningfully in conversation by aligning contributions with the discussion's current stage and intended purpose, ensuring coherence with the speaker and listener communicative goals (Grice, 1989); (Levinson, 1983).

Grice (cited in (Yule, 1996) 37) argues that successful communication depends on adherence to four fundamental conversational maxims known as the Cooperative Principle. First, the Maxim of Quality emphasizes the importance of truthfulness, requiring speakers to provide factual and evidence-based statements. Second, the Maxim of Quantity suggests that contributions should contain just the right amount of information, neither too little nor too much. Third, the Maxim of Relation stresses the need for relevance, ensuring that all remarks directly pertain to the ongoing discussion. Finally, the Maxim of Manner focuses on clarity of expression, advocating for well-organized, unambiguous, and concise communication. Together, these maxims provide a framework for effective and cooperative conversation between speakers and listeners.

In everyday conversation, interactions often deviate from ideal communication, as listeners frequently provide responses that mismatch the speaker's intent. According to Grice (1975) characterizes this phenomenon as flouting, when speakers deliberately violate conversational maxims without intending to deceive. Rather than aiming to mislead, speakers who flout the cooperative principle typically want their listeners to derive implied meanings beyond literal interpretation. There are four distinct types of flouting: (1) Quantity flouting occurs when speakers provide significantly more or less information than required; (2) Quality flouting involves making statements clearly lacking factual basis; (3) Relation flouting happens when speakers introduce irrelevant or tangential information; and (4) Manner flouting appears when communication becomes deliberately ambiguous, obscure, or unnecessarily wordy. These intentional violations serve as strategic tools in conversation, prompting listeners to look for deeper meaning beyond surface-level utterances. Speakers may intentionally violate conversational maxims to convey implicit messages or communicate in indirect ways, such deliberate breaches often serve specific communicative purposes, allowing speakers to express meanings beyond literal interpretation.

Davis (2016) describes implicature as the underlying meaning a speaker intends to convey, which goes beyond the literal interpretation of their words. As Anggryani et al., (2017) note, speakers may deliberately break conversational maxims for various purposes, including protecting others' feelings, concealing information, using humor or sarcasm, or evading certain topics of discussion. Leech (1983) classifies politeness in illocutionary functions into four distinct types, which provide a framework for analyzing why speakers might flout conversational maxims: (1) Competitive functions, where the illocutionary purpose conflicts with social norms; (2) Convivial functions, where the illocutionary and social goals align harmoniously; (3) Collaborative functions, characterized by neutrality between communicative and social objectives; and (4) Conflictive functions, involving direct opposition between illocutionary intent and social expectations. This typology demonstrates how speakers navigate politeness strategies while potentially violating Gricean maxims to achieve specific interpersonal effects.

Flouting Grice's conversational maxims can occur in any verbal interaction involving human language, for example when speakers intentionally violate expectations of relevance, clarity, or informativeness to create meaning, humor, or stronger interpersonal rapport (Al-Shboul,

2022). Therefore, instances of flouting conversational maxims can occur in both real-life interactions and fictional contexts such as movies. While violating rules may not always be considered appropriate in real-life contexts, such actions can serve as effective strategies within cinematic narratives (Astini et al., 2023). Film serves as a powerful medium of mass communication, blending visual and auditory elements through animation techniques. As a form of oral discourse, films provide rich opportunities to observe maxim flouting in action, where contextual clues and facial expressions make these violations particularly evident. By analyzing flouted maxims in films, researchers can gain valuable insights into real-life conversational dynamics, as cinematic dialogues often mirror authentic communication patterns. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of how speakers intentionally deviate from conversational norms in various social contexts.

In recent years, animated television shows have increasingly been recognized not only as sources of entertainment, but also as platforms that reflect complex communication strategies. One such strategy is flouting the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle, often used to create humor, sarcasm, or hidden meaning. The screenplay was crafted to make the dialogue sound as natural as possible, reflecting the common view of films as representations of real life, albeit with the mundane or less engaging elements omitted (Dewi et al., 2023). A notable example can be found in the character Plankton from the popular cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*, who frequently employs language in ways that intentionally violate conversational norms. This phenomenon highlights how even children's media can utilize pragmatic techniques to convey layered messages.

Plankton: The Movie (2025) is an animated musical comedy spin-off of the *SpongeBob SquarePants* franchise. Directed by Dave Needham, the film follows Plankton a character notorious for his sarcasm, exaggerated claims, and manipulative rhetoric as his ambitions for global control are upended by Karen, his sentient computer wife, who launches her own rebellion. Given Plankton's habitual use of verbal deception and irony, the film's dialogue is rife with intentional violations of Gricean maxims, a hallmark of animated comedies where humor often arises from subverting conversational norms. By examining these deliberate breaches, the study aims to illustrate how flouting operates not only as a comedic device but also as a reflection of real-world pragmatic strategies in conflict-driven discourse.

Analyzing flouting maxims in *Plankton: The Movie* is important because it reveals how animated narratives use pragmatic strategies to shape character identity, convey humor, and reflect underlying social tensions. By observing how Plankton intentionally violates conversational norms, viewers are invited to engage with layered meanings and infer intentions beyond literal speech. Such analysis not only deepens our understanding of how meaning is constructed in media texts but also underscores the role of language manipulation in shaping interpersonal dynamics. Moreover, since animated films like this reach wide audiences, including children and young adults, recognizing these linguistic strategies helps illuminate how entertainment media can subtly influence communication habits and critical thinking. Therefore, studying the flouting of maxims in this context offers valuable insights into both linguistic creativity and the pragmatics of animated storytelling.

This literature review includes three journal articles on the topic of floating maxim, derived from previous researches. The first study titled "The Analysis of Flouting Maxim in Good Morning America (GMA) Talkshow" by Marlisa & Hidayat (2020) explores the flouting of Grice's cooperative

maxims within a popular American talk show. The researchers aimed to identify the types of flouted maxims used by the host and guest, as well as the reasons for their occurrence. To carry out the study, they applied a qualitative approach using a transcript of the GMA talk show and analyzed the data based on Grice (1975) theory of the cooperative maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner). The results reveal that all four maxims were flouted, with the maxim of quantity and the maxim of manner being the highest (both at 33%), followed by the maxim of relation (20%) and the maxim of quality (14%). The study also shows that the reasons for flouting these maxims are related to creating humor, providing more information, expressing emotions, and making the conversation more enjoyable. This finding highlights those flouting maxims can serve a social purpose, especially in an informal context like a talk show.

The second article titled “Reasons for Flouting Maxim in Talk Show” by Irawan et al., (2021) aimed to analyze the types and reasons for flouting conversational maxims found in a popular American talk show. The study used Grice (1975) theory of Cooperative Principle and its four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner as its primary theoretical framework, along with Halliday (1985) theory of Context of Situation to support the analysis. The data was drawn from The Ellen Show episode featuring “Will Smith’s Full Interview.” Observation was used as the method of data collection, while a descriptive qualitative method guided the analysis. The study revealed that all four types of maxims were flouted in the conversation, with the Maxim of Quantity being the most frequently flouted. The flouting was often due to participants providing more information than necessary or elaborating spontaneously based on personal experience. The findings suggest that in natural talk show settings, speakers often flout maxims not to deceive, but to enrich interaction, engage the audience, or create humor. This study contributes to the understanding of how pragmatic principles operate in spontaneous media discourse and provides insight into the nature of unscripted communication.

The study entitled *An Analysis of Flouting Maxim in a Talk Show Program in Indonesia*” was conducted by Firda et al., (2021) This research aimed to identify the types of flouting maxims and analyze the reasons behind their occurrence in a talk show. The researchers used Grice (1975) theory of the Cooperative Principle, which includes the four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. A descriptive qualitative method was applied, and the data were taken from the video of Sapa Indonesia Malam featuring Jerinx as the guest. The researchers engaged in transcribing, translating, and analyzing the utterances as classified by the types of maxims flouted. The resultant data revealed that flouting of the maxim of relation predominated (50%), followed by quantity (22%), manner (17%), and quality (11%). The study also highlighted four primary reasons behind the flouting: suddenly Altering the discussion, refusing to provide direct answers, straying from the main topic, and making mocking remarks. This study contributes to understanding how conversational maxims are often disregarded in public discourse and how such violations can reflect underlying communicative intentions.

METHOD

The current research a descriptive qualitative approach was employed to investigate how the main character flouted conversational maxims in *Plankton: The Movie* (2025), directed by Dave Needham. The descriptive qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth analysis of language use within its context, which is particularly useful for uncovering implied meanings and communicative intent behind utterances. The data source for this research was

Plankton: The Movie (2025), with a specific focus on the utterances of the main character, Plankton. Data collection was conducted through an observational method. First, the researcher watched the film and reviewed its transcript multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the dialogue. Utterances that potentially flouted Grice's maxims were identified and noted for further analysis. The data analysis involved categorizing each utterance based on the Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1975), which encompasses the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. To explore the character's motivations for flouting these maxims, the analysis was supported by Leech (1983) theory of Illocutionary Functions of Politeness. This framework helped identify the communicative goals behind each violation. The data presentation combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. A frequency table was used to display the number and percentage of each type of flouted maxim, providing a clear numerical overview of the patterns. In addition, a qualitative discussion of selected dialogue excerpts was included to illustrate the nature of each violation and the context in which it occurred. Overall, this methodological approach enabled a thorough and systematic exploration of how maxim flouting functions as a communicative strategy within the film..

RESULTS

This finding relates to the types of flouting maxim committed by the main character. Based on the analysis of the types of maxims violated, the researcher found that all the maxims of the Cooperation Principle were violated by the main character. There are 22 occurrences of maxims that are violated in the movie Plankton: The Movie. The data results are presented in the table below:

Table 1 The Occurrences of Flouting Maxims in Plankton: The Movie

NO	Types of Flouting Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Flouting Maxim of Quantity	4	18,1%
2.	Flouting Maxim of Quality	6	27,2%
3.	Flouting Maxim of Relation	7	31,8%
4.	Flouting Maxim of Manner	5	22,7%
	Total:	22	100%

The table shows 22 instances of maxim flouting in Plankton's utterances. The most frequently flouted maxim was the maxim of relation, occurring in 7 utterances (31.8%). This was followed by the maxim of quality, which appeared in 6 utterances (27.2%), the maxim of manner in 5 utterances (22.7%), and finally, the maxim of quantity, which was the least frequent with 4 utterances (18.1%).

DISCUSSION

In this part, the researcher tries to analyze the reasons behind the utterances that flouted by the main character in Plankton: The Movie.

Flouting Maxim of Quantity

The flouting maxim of quantity occurs when the speaker is giving too much or less information than it should be (Grice, 1975). The following example is provided below.

Data 1

Plankton : And what's this supposed to be?

Karen : It's chum. I just added a little sugar, some pizzazz, and now it tastes like world domination!

Plankton : **Where's the evil, Karen? Where is the evil?! I don't see it!**
 Karen : It's still fast food. There's the evil.

(Plankton: The Movie, 0:10:34 – 0:10:54)

This scene takes place after Karen has experimented with a new version of chum for the Chum Bucket. She has added sugar and “pizzazz” to make it more attractive to customers, hoping to turn it into a successful product. When Plankton arrives, he is skeptical and questions Karen about the changes she has made. He feels that the new version of chum lacks the “evil” and “malicious” essence that he always envisioned for their brand. In this moment, Plankton is shocked and frustrated, unable to accept Karen’s more consumer-friendly approach to running the Chum Bucket. The flouting maxim of quantity occurs when the speaker is giving too much or less information than it should be. On the shown data above, Plankton’s flouts the maxim of quantity because he gives too much information. It is proven when Karen replies to Plankton’s first question about the new look of the bucket of chum. He repeats the same question three times and adds emotional emphasis, without offering any new information or progressing the conversation.

Plankton’s flouting of the maxim of quantity is attributed to its connection with the illocutionary function, which is conflictive, as it resembles a reprimand or an accusation. There is a conflict between Plankton’s goal to express shock and disapproval and the social goal of having a neutral, productive conversation. Instead of responding with a short and direct comment, Plankton repeats the question “Where’s the evil, Karen? Where is the evil?! I don’t see it!” which gives more information than needed. He does this intentionally to show how upset and frustrated he is. In this way, Plankton’s flouting of the maxim of quantity emphasizes his strong disapproval of the changes Karen has made.

Flouting Maxim of Quality

The speaker flouts the maxim of quality when they making statements that clearly have no basis in fact (Grice, 1975). This can be seen in the example below.

Data 2

Super Snarky Karen : Hold on, Evil! There are steps to be taken for world domination.
 Plankton : **World domination? That's my thing!**
 Super Snarky Karen : Not anymore, Green Bean! We're gonna do what you could never do.
 Plankton : **What do you mean?**

(Plankton: The Movie, 0:16:02 – 0:16:16)

In this particular scene, Karen reaches a breaking point after enduring Plankton’s continuous dismissive, patronizing, and egotistical behavior. Her frustration manifests in a dramatic way, giving rise to three distinct aspects of her personality Super Snarky Karen, Super Smart Karen, and Super Evil Karen. These three personas represent different dimensions of Karen’s intelligence, ambition, and assertiveness, and they take over her body to confront Plankton directly. This sudden shift disrupts the long-standing dynamic in which Plankton positions himself as the sole mastermind behind their evil schemes. The emergence of these alters egos signals Karen’s demand for equality in their partnership and her refusal to be sidelined any longer. The power struggle between them becomes evident when Plankton tries to maintain his position of authority by insisting that “world domination” is “his thing.” Here, the flouting of the maxim of

quality occurs. According to Grice (1975), this maxim requires speakers to say only what they believe to be true and supported by evidence. Plankton's statement contradicts this principle, as he has repeatedly failed in his numerous attempts to dominate the world throughout the series. By claiming ownership over something he has never accomplished, Plankton presents a statement that he knows is untrue, and therefore intentionally violates the maxim of quality. The utterance becomes even more ironic when juxtaposed with Super Snarky Karen's sharp observation, which implies that his statement lacks factual basis. Plankton's repeated assertion, despite the obvious contradiction with reality, exemplifies a deliberate and exaggerated form of falsehood used not to deceive but to emphasize his wounded pride and fragile ego.

The motivation behind Plankton's violation of the maxim of quality stems from its relation to the conflictive illocutionary function, as his utterance aims to challenge and oppose Karen's claim rather than to maintain a cooperative or harmonious interaction. In this scene, Plankton insists that "world domination" is "his thing" despite knowing this is not true, using this statement as a way to assert dominance and defend his pride. This creates a conflict between his illocutionary goal preserving his status as the evil genius and the social goal of acknowledging the reality of their situation. By making this exaggeration, Plankton intentionally misleads or distorts the truth, highlighting the tension and rivalry between the characters. In this way, the flouting of the maxim of quality operates within the conflictive illocutionary category, serving to assert authority and resist Karen's challenge.

Flouting Maxim of Relation

According to Grice (1975), the maxim of relation requires contributions to be relevant. When flouted, the listener must infer the speaker's true intention. An example is shown below.

Data 3

Rube : [gulps down on slushie] Ahh! Amazing!

Karen : See? They love it!

Plankton : **I don't care if they marry it! None of these cockamamie changes are going to help me steal the secret formula.**

(Plankton: The Movie, 0:10:58 – 0:11:09)

In this scene, Karen proudly introduces her latest improvements to the Chum Bucket, which include a more appealing product that successfully attracts new customers, such as Rube. As Rube expresses excitement and satisfaction with the slushie, Karen feels validated by the positive response. She takes this as a sign that her approach to business is working and seeks recognition from Plankton. However, Plankton remains uninterested and dismissive. Rather than acknowledging the success, he continues to focus solely on his long-standing goal of stealing the Krabby Patty secret formula. This moment highlights a clear violation of Grice (1975) maxim of relation, which requires speakers to make contributions that are relevant to the ongoing conversation. When Karen emphasizes customer satisfaction and the growing popularity of their product, Plankton responds with comments that are completely disconnected from that topic. His fixation on the secret formula has no relevance to the immediate discussion, thereby flouting the maxim of relation. The disconnect between Karen's enthusiasm and Plankton's response creates tension and demonstrates his refusal to engage cooperatively in the conversation.

The conflictive illocutionary function underlies Plankton's tendency to flout the maxim of relation, as his utterance aims to oppose and reject Karen's statement rather than align with it. In this scene, Plankton deliberately shifts the focus from Karen's point about customer satisfaction to his obsession with stealing the Krabby patty secret formula. By doing so, he creates a conflict between the social goal of responding appropriately and his illocutionary goal of asserting his priorities. Plankton's reply conveys his refusal to acknowledge Karen's contribution, signaling that anything unrelated to the secret formula is irrelevant and worthless to him. In this way, his flouting of the maxim of relevance operates within the conflictive category, serving to highlight the tension between their differing objectives.

Flouting Maxim of Manner

According to Grice (1975), flouting the maxim of relation occurs when a speaker gives an irrelevant response that forces the listener to infer the intended meaning. The following examples are given below.

Data 4

Karen : Oh! You're finally here. Surprise!

Plankton : **What in Neptune's nostrils have you done to my restaurant?**

(Plankton: The Movie, 0:09:58 – 0:10:05)

This scene takes place shortly after Plankton's latest failure to steal the Krabby Patty secret formula. After being thrown out of the Krusty Krab, he returns to the Chum Bucket expecting it to remain gloomy, uninviting, and deserted. However, to his surprise, Karen has completely transformed the restaurant into a bright, modern, and customer-friendly space. The once-empty Chum Bucket is now filled with enthusiastic customers, marking a stark contrast to Plankton's usual expectations. Overwhelmed by this unexpected change, Plankton reacts with confusion and disbelief. According to Grice (1975) cooperative principle, the maxim of manner requires speakers to avoid ambiguity and speak in a clear and orderly manner. In this scene, Plankton flouts the maxim of manner by using figurative and exaggerated language rather than a straightforward response. Instead of plainly asking, "What happened to my restaurant?" he exclaims, "What in Neptune's nostrils?!" This metaphorical expression adds comic effect and dramatic emphasis but sacrifices clarity, making his reaction ambiguous and emotionally charged.

The reason Plankton flouts the maxim of manner is related to the illocutionary function, which is conflictive, as it resembles an accusation or reprimand. There is a conflict between his illocutionary goal and the social goal. Plankton aims to express shock and disapproval towards Karen for making unexpected changes to the Chum Bucket. As a result, he chooses an obscure and figurative expression to emphasize his disbelief, rather than a clear or orderly one. In doing so, he prioritizes expressing his frustration over maintaining politeness and clarity.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the types of flouting maxims and the motivations behind their use by the main character in Plankton: The Movie. A total of 22 instances of maxim flouting were identified, covering all four categories of Grice's Cooperative Principle: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Among these, the maxim of relation was most frequently flouted, followed by quality, manner, and

quantity. The analysis shows that Plankton's violations were intentional and context-dependent, serving specific communicative functions rather than aiming to deceive. Each type of maxim flouting reflected distinct illocutionary purposes: the flouting of quantity maxim expressed emotional intensity or criticism through exaggeration or withholding; quality maxim flouting was used conflictively, often through irony or false claims to challenge others; relation maxim flouting served to evade or confront, by shifting topics or ignoring relevance; and manner maxim flouting emphasized expressive intentions through figurative or dramatic language. These strategies reflect the character's unique personality and ongoing conflicts throughout the film, indicating that maxim flouting in animated media is not merely for humor, but a narrative tool to reveal character motives and shape audience perception. This study highlights how pragmatic analysis uncovers deeper meaning in fictional dialogue and affirms the value of animated texts as rich sources for linguistic and communicative insight.

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