

## Flouting Conversational Maxims: A Pragmatic Analysis of Anne Hathaway's Interviews on the Tonight Show

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### ABSTRACT

*This research presents an examination of the flouting of conversational maxims in The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, featuring Anne Hathaway as the guest. The objectives of this study are to identify which maxims are flouted by both the host and the guest, and to explore the underlying reasons for these violations. This analysis employs a qualitative method, with data sourced from a YouTube video. The primary research instrument consists of a transcript of the dialogue between Jimmy Fallon and Anne Hathaway that includes instances of flouted maxims. To identify and interpret the occurrences of maxim flouting, this study utilizes Grice's theory of the Cooperative Principle, which comprises four categories of maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. The results of the study demonstrate that the maxim of quantity is the most frequently flouted with (50%) percentage, followed by relevance (29%), manner (14%), and quality (7%). Based on the results, the interaction in those interviews often relies on providing too much information, so the guest will mostly speak. The goal of this flouting is to give a sense of humor to engage the audience's interest in the conversation on this talk show.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Talk shows are a rich site for analyzing spontaneous language use and pragmatic strategies such as implicature and maxim flouting. One key theoretical approach in pragmatic discourse is Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), which asserts that effective communication relies on four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. However, these maxims are frequently flouted in entertainment contexts for humorous effect or interpersonal bonding (Cutting, 2002).

Maxim flouting is not an indication of communicative failure but rather a strategic move to imply additional meanings (implicature) that the audience is expected to interpret. Anne Hathaway's appearance on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon provides a compelling context for examining this phenomenon. Both Hathaway and Fallon engage in light teasing, anecdotal storytelling, and humorous exchanges that regularly challenge Gricean norms of cooperation.

While several studies have examined maxim flouting in political discourse (Ali et al., 2022) or animated films (Gustary & Anggraini, 2021), fewer have focused on its role in celebrity interviews. Therefore, this study

fills that gap by analyzing how maxim flouting operates in a high-profile, unscripted talk show segment. The objective is not only to identify instances of flouted maxims but also to interpret their communicative function in fostering engagement, humor, and intimacy with the audience.

This study uses a transcript of Anne Hathaway's 2024 interview with Jimmy Fallon, analyzing selected segments using qualitative content analysis. The results are expected to enhance our understanding of pragmatic strategies in entertainment media and their impact on shaping public discourse.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective communication relies not only on the explicit transmission of meaning but also on the nuanced interpretation of implicit messages. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle provides a foundational framework for analyzing such interactions, outlining four key maxims: quantity (providing sufficient information), quality (ensuring truthfulness), relation (maintaining relevance), and manner (being clear and concise). However, speakers frequently deviate from these maxims intentionally, a phenomenon known as flouting. As Cutting (2002) observes, flouting occurs when a speaker deliberately violates a maxim to prompt the listener to derive a more profound, often unstated meaning. This strategic non-adherence underscores the complexity of human communication, where meaning is not always literal but shaped by context, inference, and shared understanding.

### 2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Contributions

The deliberate flouting of conversational maxims has been extensively examined within pragmatics, particularly in its role in generating implicature. As Thomas (2013) argues, such violations are typically strategic rather than misleading, designed to prompt the listener to infer meaning rather than to obscure it. This perspective is reinforced by Yule (1996), who contends that Grice's maxims function as pragmatic guidelines that facilitate coherent and effective communication. Indeed, the Cooperative Principle serves as a cornerstone of linguistic interaction, providing a framework for meaningful discourse. Finch (2000) further emphasizes that these maxims operate as tacit conventions, shaping how speakers construct and interpret utterances within a given context. The significance of these principles extends to language acquisition, as Hall and Walsh (2002) demonstrate, noting that adherence to conversational maxims is crucial for fostering successful classroom interaction and second-language development. Thus, while maxims may be flouted for rhetorical or inferential purposes, their underlying role in structuring communication remains fundamental.

Cutting (2008) further expands on the pragmatic functions of flouting maxims, noting that speakers often exploit these violations for rhetorical purposes, including humor, sarcasm, and strategic deflection. Such deliberate deviations are pervasive in various discourse domains, from media exchanges and political rhetoric to literary dialogues, underscoring the broader sociolinguistic relevance of Gricean principles. Beyond their foundational role in facilitating straightforward communication, these maxims—when intentionally flouted—reveal language's dynamic capacity for social negotiation, persuasion, and creative expression. The enduring value of Grice's framework lies in its ability to account not only for the transmission of literal meaning but also for the nuanced ways in which speakers manipulate conversational norms to achieve subtle, context-dependent effects. This dual focus on both cooperative and strategic language use solidifies pragmatics as a vital lens for analyzing the complexities of human interaction.

Recent scholarship has expanded the application of Gricean pragmatics by incorporating socio-pragmatic and intercultural dimensions, revealing important variations in how conversational norms operate across linguistic and cultural contexts. Wierzbicka (1991) challenges the universality of Grice's maxims, arguing that interpretations of flouting are deeply culture-bound. What may signal irony or implicature in one sociolinguistic setting could be perceived as confusion or even rudeness in another. This cultural relativity is further explored by House (2000), who highlights how cross-cultural miscommunication often stems from divergent expectations regarding implicature, politeness, and indirectness. Such findings suggest that while Grice's Cooperative Principle provides a robust framework for analyzing conversational inference, its application must be carefully contextualized to account for cultural variability. A more nuanced approach, integrating universal pragmatic principles with culture-specific norms, would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how implicature functions in diverse communicative settings. This interdisciplinary perspective not only enriches pragmatic theory but also has practical implications for fields such as intercultural communication, language teaching, and discourse analysis.

From a developmental standpoint, the acquisition of pragmatic competence, particularly the ability to recognize and strategically employ flouted maxims, constitutes an essential yet challenging dimension of language learning. Kasper and Rose (2002) emphasize that achieving true communicative proficiency necessitates learners to surpass grammatical accuracy and develop sensitivity to socio-pragmatic conventions, including when and how to violate conversational maxims for rhetorical or interpersonal effect deliberately. This process involves not only cognitive and linguistic development but also socio-cultural awareness, as learners must navigate context-dependent norms that govern implicature and indirectness. The study of Grice's Cooperative Principle and its intentional violations thus occupies a central position at the intersection of theoretical and applied linguistics,

informing both our understanding of natural language use and practical approaches to pedagogy. Such research highlights the complexity of pragmatic acquisition, where mastery extends beyond rule-based competence to include the flexible, culturally-situated negotiation of meaning—a critical skill for effective communication in both first and additional languages.

### 2.1.1 Previous Research and Recent Findings

Empirical studies across diverse communicative contexts consistently demonstrate how strategic flouting of Gricean maxims serves distinct pragmatic functions. Firda et al.'s (2021) analysis of *Sapa Indonesia Malam* reveals that relation maxim violations dominate (50%), reflecting a preference for indirectness when addressing sensitive topics, a pattern characteristic of high-context communication cultures. This aligns with Ali et al.'s (2022) findings in political discourse, where public figures like Isran Noor on *Mata Najwa* systematically flout relevance to evade contentious questions, illustrating how maxim violations function as face-saving strategies in high-stakes interactions.

Media discourse exhibits different patterns, as shown by Marlisa and Hidayat's (2020) study of *Good Morning America*, where Jackie Chan predominantly flouted quantity and manner maxims—a tactic commonly employed by celebrities managing their public personas. Meanwhile, Lestari's (2019) examination of *Home Alone 2* demonstrates how fictional narratives exploit all four maxims for comedic and characterization purposes, proving that flouting extends beyond natural conversation into scripted performance.

Digital communication further diversifies these practices: Priyatmojo and Handayani (2021) found Twitter users frequently violate quantity for sarcastic or humorous effects, leveraging platform constraints to generate implicature. Collectively, these studies underscore that flouting is not merely a deviation from cooperative norms but a sophisticated, context-dependent strategy employed across spoken, mediated, and digital discourse to achieve interpersonal, rhetorical, and narrative goals. The recurrence of relation flouting in sensitive or evasive contexts versus quantity/manner manipulation in image-conscious or constrained mediums suggests that different maxims serve distinct communicative priorities depending on genre and purpose.

### 2.1.2 Critical Evaluation and Methodological Contributions

Existing research on flouting maxims has predominantly relied on qualitative descriptive approaches, analyzing transcripts from films, interviews, or televised discussions. This methodological choice enables rich contextual interpretation, revealing nuanced patterns in how speakers strategically deviate from conversational norms for rhetorical or interpersonal purposes. However, while such studies offer valuable insights into pragmatic strategies, such as irony, topic shifting, and ambiguity (Cutting, 2002), their reliance on manual analysis of limited datasets raises concerns about generalizability.

A persistent challenge in this body of work is the inconsistent differentiation between intentional flouting (which generates implicature) and unintentional violations of maxims, a distinction Grice himself emphasized and Levinson (1983) later clarified. This theoretical blurring, combined with the inherent subjectivity of coding pragmatic phenomena, underscores the need for more rigorous analytical frameworks. Future studies could strengthen reliability by incorporating quantitative methods, such as corpus-based frequency analysis, or by employing computational tools to track flouting patterns across larger datasets systematically.

Additionally, while existing research has meticulously catalogued verbal strategies of maxim flouting, it often overlooks the role of paralinguistic cues, tone, pause, facial expressions, or gestures that frequently accompany and reinforce implied meanings. A more multimodal approach would align with real-world communication, where flouting operates not just through words but through embodied and contextual signals. Addressing these methodological gaps would not only enhance empirical robustness but also refine theoretical models of how implicature functions across diverse communicative settings.

## 2.2 Pedagogical and Applied Implications

The pedagogical implications of flouting maxims research are substantial, particularly for developing learners' pragmatic competence and critical language awareness. While traditional language instruction often prioritizes grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition, incorporating pragmatic elements—such as analyzing how speakers strategically violate conversational maxims—can significantly enhance communicative proficiency, especially in intercultural contexts. Authentic materials, such as film dialogues, political interviews, and social media exchanges, provide rich opportunities for learners to observe and practice these strategies through activities like role-plays and discourse analysis. As Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) demonstrate, explicit pragmatics instruction not only improves comprehension of implied meaning but also equips learners with essential tools for real-world communication.

Beyond language education, understanding maxim flouting has professional relevance in fields requiring nuanced interpretation of discourse, including journalism, diplomacy, and counseling. For instance, journalists deconstructing political evasion tactics or negotiators interpreting indirect responses can apply pragmatic analysis to uncover patterns of strategic communication. This underscores the broader value of Gricean pragmatics as both an analytical framework and a practical skill set for navigating complex social interactions across multiple

domains. Integrating such training into specialized professional development programs could enhance effectiveness in high-stakes communicative contexts where reading between the lines is crucial.

### 3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze conversational data taken from the transcript of *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, specifically the episode featuring Anne Hathaway. The data was collected from a verified video and its transcribed dialogue. The primary focus was to identify instances where the conversational maxims proposed by Grice (1975) were flouted.

The research instrument consisted of the interview transcript, which was reviewed multiple times to ensure accurate identification of maxim flouting. The utterances were categorized based on the type of maxim flouted: quantity, quality, relation, or manner. To determine the flouting, the analysis used indicators such as exaggeration, irrelevance, ambiguity, or sarcasm, following the frameworks of Cutting (2002) and Yule (1996).

Each instance was coded and organized into a table to indicate the type of maxim flouted, the speaker (Fallon or Hathaway), the excerpted utterance, and the inferred implicature. This method allows for a systematic yet interpretive approach that uncovers the layers of meaning behind conversational violations.

The data analysis procedure involved a systematic approach. First, utterances that appeared to violate one or more of Grice's maxims were identified. Second, each instance was categorized according to the specific maxim that was flouted. Third, the pragmatic functions and implied meanings underlying these violations were examined to uncover their communicative intent. Fourth, the findings were synthesized and interpreted within the framework of established pragmatic theories. By analyzing spontaneous dialogue from a naturally occurring talk show, the study maintains ecological validity and offers nuanced insight into the deployment of pragmatic strategies in celebrity-media discourse.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Result of Study

This part presents and examines instances where conversational maxims are flouted during Anne Hathaway's interviews on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, according to Grice's (1975) framework, which identifies four key maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. This analysis highlights how these principles are deliberately violated for pragmatic effect. A summary of the specific maxims flouted is provided in the table as follows.

**Table 1.** Flouting Maxim.

Types of Maxims	Flouting
Maxims of Quantity	7 (50%)
Maxims of Quality	1 (7%)
Maxims of Manner	2 (14%)
Maxims of Relevance	4 (29%)
Total	14 (100%)

Based on the data summary above, the results show that the highest frequency of flouting is the maxim of quantity, which appeared seven times. The second is maxims of relevance, which appeared four times, followed by maxims of manner in third position, which appeared twice. And the last is the maxims of quality, with only one appearing. Based on the results, the interaction or conversation in those interviews often relies on providing too much information, as it is a type of interview, so the guest will mostly speak. The goal of this flouting is to give a sense of humor to engage the audience's interest in the conversation on this talk show.

### 4.2 Discussion

Below is the discussion result of the flouting of maxims between the guest and the host in *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. There are abbreviations used in this analysis, which are described as follows:

AH: Anne Hathaway

JF: Jimmy Fallon

#### 4.2.1 Maxim of Quantity

Datum 1

**JF:** ... Is there a party game that you're especially good at?

**AH:** Es-- No. I mean, you know, I was playing a game -- **We play a lot of Pokémon and we play a lot of Trouble and Sorry! But there is a game -- I was working last week, and I was on set, and we were just passing the time.** And have you seen that movie trivia game where it's cards and they -- and it just asks you questions?

**Flouted:** At minute 1.05, Anne Hathaway flouts the maxim of quantity by providing more information than what was asked. Instead of giving a simple answer naming one party game, she trails off into an elaborate explanation about various games she plays and unrelated on-set activities. The excessive detail digresses from the central question. This flouting is seen as ineffective because it interferes with the communication, so the host must follow the rhythm of the conversation to ask more about it. However, it makes the audience interested in Anna's stories because they relate to something she and the audience share a liking for.

Datum 2

**JF:** Did the crowd go nuts?

**AH:** So, they -- So, by the way, I have to say, that's Josh Gad and that's Andrew Rannells. They're both dear friends. And they're so -- They were so brilliant in the show. It was really next level. And at the end of the show, they invite two people up onstage. **And, so, they said my name first, and the audience had a very nice reaction. And then they said Anna's name, and it was like rock star.**

**Flouted:** At minute 2.48, Hathaway provides an extended narrative and background context rather than directly answering the question about the audience's reaction. The flouting occurs because she provides more information than the required amount, thus violating the maxim of quantity. However, this flouting serves a storytelling function to create the punchline and acts as a comedic narration in this conversation.

Based on the data above, the writers can conclude that the flouting of the maxim of quantity in this talk show mostly lies in providing too much information, which is not just seen as a problem, but can also create a humorous atmosphere that attracts the audience's interest.

#### 4.2.2 *Maxim of Relevance*

Datum 1

**JF:** Do you ever -- Do you kind of do a project and then you kind of block it out of your mind or no? You just -- It just so happens you...

**AH:** I don't know. I'm not huge on looking back. It is kind of funny when -- Like, because, you know, **I was in this movie when I was 17 years old called "The Princess Diaries."**

**Flouted:** At minute 2.07, Hathaway flouts the maxim of relevance by abruptly bringing up "The Princess Diaries," which is not directly related to Fallon's question about her memory habits post-project. This shift in topic serves a nostalgic and humorous purpose, indirectly addressing the question by pointing out how far back her career stretches and the type of memory that still lingers.

Datum 2

**AH:** What's a book?

**JF:** Yeah. No, too late. No, too late. But this is based on the big best-selling book.

**Flouted:** At minute 8.35, Jimmy Fallon flouts the maxim of relevance by responding to Anne Hathaway's question with a deliberately dismissive and playful reply. Instead of directly addressing her ironic remark or explaining the book, Fallon chooses to brush it off humorously. His response is intentionally off-topic and non-informative, but it contributes to the comedic rhythm of the segment and reinforces the playful dynamic between the host and guest.

In conclusion, the flouting of maxims of relevance serves as a strategic tool to enhance humor and maintain a playful, entertaining atmosphere. By intentionally diverting from expected responses, both the host and guest create moments of surprise and amusement that engage the audience and reinforce their on-screen chemistry.

#### 4.2.3 *Maxim of Manner*

Datum 1

**AH:** Something takes over. I'm less competitive now.

**JF:** Why?

**AH:** Kids.

**Flouted:** At minute 0.31, Anne's single-word answer lacks clarity and specificity, flouting the maxim of manner. While technically true and minimally informative, it intentionally creates ambiguity, as it can lead someone to think that having kids changes everything, while others may be confused.

Datum 2

**JF:** She's so cool.

**AH:** She's so cool.

**JF:** She's so cool.

**AH:** So cool.

**Flouted:** At minute 3.37, Anna flouts the maxim of manner by repeating vague and uninformative affirmations. This repetition lacks clarity and adds no new content. However, it serves as a joke, and bonding like this is a part of the talk show's rhythm. It helps to build an entertaining rapport between the host and the guest.

In conclusion, the flouting of the maxim of manner in these talks adds humor and reflects the natural, playful flow of the conversation. Instead of being precise or detailed, the vague responses create a light, relatable atmosphere that strengthens the connection between the host, the guest, and the audience.



#### 4.2.4 Maxim of Quality

##### Datum 1

**JF:** Well, you know your stuff. You know movies.

**AH:** I didn't -- I mean, apparently, I do. And then I got to this one question, and they were like, "Oh, okay. So, uh, junior executive assistant, 'Devil Wears Prada.'" **I'm just like, "Emily Blunt." And they were like, "No." And it wasn't her.** It was me. So...

**Flouted:** At minute 1.34, Anne Hathaway flouts the maxim of quality by pretending not to recognize her own character in the trivia game, falsely answering "Emily Blunt" to a question about her own film. This intentional mistake is ironic and humorous. The flouting creates a self-deprecating joke that entertains the audience and shows her comfort with laughing at herself.

To conclude, flouting the maxim of quality in this talk show rarely appears because misleading information will disrupt the trust in an entertainment setting. Moreover, in this talk show, it just serves as a joke to entertain the audience.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

This research examines the pragmatic phenomenon of flouting conversational maxims in a celebrity interview on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, with a specific focus on Anne Hathaway's guest appearance on the show. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study explores how both the host and the guest strategically violate Grice's four conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relevance, and manner—to achieve various communicative goals. By analyzing a transcript of the interview, the research identifies specific utterances where these maxims are flouted and interprets the pragmatic effects they create.

The findings reveal that the maxim of quantity is the most frequently flouted, with seven occurrences (50%). This is followed by the maxim of relevance (29%), the maxim of manner (14%), and the maxim of quality (7%). The predominance of quantity violations indicates a conversational pattern in which the speaker—especially the guest—intentionally provides more information than necessary. While this may initially seem like a breakdown in communication, in the context of a talk show, it functions to keep the audience engaged through storytelling and humor.

Each instance of flouting serves a unique pragmatic function. Quantity violations often result in humorous over-explanations or anecdotes that enrich the dialogue. Relevance violations usually involve playful topic shifts or sarcastic responses that entertain rather than confuse. Manner violations—through vague or repetitive statements—enhance the conversational rhythm and rapport between host and guest. The single quality violation identified showcases self-deprecating humor, demonstrating that even truth-related maxims can be bent for comedic effect without compromising the integrity of the interaction.

This study highlights the richness of pragmatic creativity in talk show conversations. Rather than strictly adhering to conversational norms, participants strategically bend these rules to foster humor, establish camaraderie, and maintain audience interest. These findings contribute to our understanding of how Grice's maxims operate in real-world, media-rich environments, where communication is shaped not only by the intent to inform but also to entertain and connect.

In essence, while flouting conversational maxims might seem like a breakdown of cooperative communication, in the context of a celebrity talk show, it is a deliberate and effective strategy. It serves to create entertainment value, emphasize certain emotions or stories, and reflect the informal yet performative nature of televised interviews. This research contributes to the growing body of literature that applies pragmatic theory to media discourse, offering insight into how flouting conversational norms can still lead to successful and meaningful communications.

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