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Flouting of Gricean Maxims in Barbie (2023): A Gender-Oriented Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

Keywords:

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This study aims to analyze the flouting maxim and the strategies based on the characters' gender in the movie *Barbie (2023)* with the use of Grice's (1975) flouting maxim theory and Cutting's (2002) strategies of flouting maxim theory. A descriptive qualitative approach was used to examine the flouting maxim and the strategies within the character's utterance in the movie. The result of the analysis reveals that all four types of flouting maxims are present in the movie with a total of 44 data. Specifically, female characters flouted 12 of the maxims of quantity, 5 of the maxims of quality, 8 of the maxims of relation and 5 of the maxims of manner, while male characters flouted 5 of the maxims of quantity, 6 of the maxim relation, 3 of the maxims of manner, and no data for maxim of quality. The findings reveal that female and male characters tend to flout maxims through irrelevant statements strategy. These results highlight that language use is not only shaped by cooperative principles but also by gendered patterns of communication that influence how speakers express meaning. Overall, the findings suggest that gender differences play a crucial role in determining how conversational maxims are flouted and how specific strategies are employed in interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, serving as the primary means through which people share ideas, emotions, and information. It can occur both verbally and non-verbally, involving at least two participants, a speaker and a listener, who work together to construct and interpret meaning. However, effective communication is not always easily achieved. Misunderstandings often arise when messages rely on implied meanings that are not immediately recognized by the listener. As Rajawat (2020) notes, successful communication requires mutual understanding and appropriate feedback, emphasizing the complexity of interpreting meaning beyond the literal level.

Effective communication does not occur naturally; it requires certain principles that guide how people exchange information clearly and meaningfully. Grice (1975) introduced these principles through four conversational maxims, quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, which serve as rules to maintain cooperation between speakers and listeners. For example, when a person answers a question directly and sufficiently, they follow the maxim of quantity. When someone provides truthful information, they adhere to the maxim of quality. Staying on topic represents the maxim of relevance; while speaking clearly and orderly reflects the maxim of manner. These maxims help speakers create mutual understanding in everyday conversations. However, people do not always follow these rules; they sometimes violate or intentionally flout them, which can lead to miscommunication or produce deeper implied meanings depending on the context.

Even with the presence of conversational maxims, misunderstandings still frequently occur in communication. When speakers intentionally or unintentionally disregard these maxims, the situation is known as *flouting a maxim*. This phenomenon happens when the speaker's message differs from the literal meaning of their words, often creating implied or indirect meaning. For example, when someone provides more information than needed, they flout the maxim of quantity; when they give false information, they flout the maxim of quality; when their response is unrelated, they flout the maxim of relevance; and when their statement is ambiguous, they flout the maxim of manner. Such deviations do not always signal poor communication, often, they serve a specific purpose, such as softening criticism, expressing humor, or managing social relationships.

Moreover, gender differences also play a crucial role in how flouting occurs. According to Bui (2021), males and females tend to use language differently, which can lead to misinterpretation in interaction. Handayani (2023) also notes that miscommunication between men and women remains common even in the era of gender equality. Female speakers are often more expressive and detailed, which may lead them to flout the maxim of quantity, while male speakers tend to be more direct or brief, occasionally flouting the maxim of manner. These distinctions highlight how gender and language use intersect, shaping conversational styles and influencing how meaning is constructed and understood.

Conversation is an essential aspect of human interaction that allows people to exchange meaning and maintain relationships. As communication evolves, it is no longer limited to real-life situations but can also be observed in various media, including literature and films. Movies, as stated by Albiladi et al. (2018), represent real-life situations and events that mirror human communication. One such example is *Barbie* (2023), a film that tells the story of Barbie and Ken as they leave their fantasy world and face the realities of human society in Los Angeles. Beyond its visual appeal and commercial success, it won the Golden Globe Award for Cinematic and Box

Office Achievement and became the highest-grossing film of 2023, the movie also raises important social issues about gender, patriarchy, and inequality. These themes are reflected through the characters' dialogues, which often reveal subtle violations of conversational principles.

The present study analyzes how flouting of Gricean maxims occurs in the *Barbie* (2023) movie and identifies the strategies used by the characters in doing so. Furthermore, this research applies a gender-oriented perspective to examine how male and female characters differ in their ways of flouting maxims, thereby providing insight into gender-based communication patterns in contemporary film discourse.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative descriptive method because the researcher aimed to analyze the types and strategies of flouting maxims found in the *Barbie* (2023) movie script. As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), a qualitative approach enables a detailed understanding of human behavior and communication in specific contexts.

In this study, the data source was essential in providing accurate and relevant information related to the research focus. Therefore, the data source of this study is taken from the *Barbie* (2023) movie script, directed by Greta Gerwig and released on July 19, 2023, in Indonesia, with a total duration of one hour and fifty-four minutes. The movie presents a blend of fantasy and social commentary, addressing issues of gender, patriarchy, and self-identity through its engaging storyline. The data of this study consist of the utterances spoken by the characters in the movie, which are analyzed to identify the types and strategies of flouting maxims that appear in their interactions. By examining the characters' dialogue, this study aims to understand how communication reflects gender-based differences and contributes to the overall meaning of the film.

The data were collected from the characters' utterances in the *Barbie* (2023) movie script. A total of 44 excerpts were selected as the primary data, 30 from female characters and 14 from male characters. Each excerpt was chosen based on its relevance to the flouting of Grice's maxims and the presence of gender-based communication traits. The data collection process involved several stages:

1. Watching the *Barbie* (2023) movie and reviewing the complete script carefully to identify the characters' interactions and utterances.
2. Selecting utterances that show instances of flouting maxims based on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle.
3. Categorizing the identified utterances according to the types of flouted maxims.
4. Classifying the utterances according to the characters' gender to distinguish male and female communication patterns.
5. Analyzing the utterances using Cutting's (2002) framework to determine the flouting strategies used.
6. Describing and interpreting the findings in detail to explain how gender influences the way conversational maxims are flouted in the *Barbie* movie.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study based on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Cutting's (2002) theory of flouting strategies, analyzed from a gender-based perspective. The analysis is divided into two parts: (1) maxim flouted and the strategies by female characters, and (2) maxim flouted and the strategies by male characters. The discussion reveals how both genders flout conversational maxims differently, reflecting distinct communication styles and social roles that shape the way meaning is conveyed in the movie.

Table 1. Flouting Maxim

No.	Types	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Flouting Maxim of Quality	M	0	0%
		F	5	11.3%
2.	Flouting Maxim of Quantity	M	5	11.3%
		F	12	27.2%
3.	Flouting Maxim of Relation	M	6	13.6%
		F	8	18.1%
4.	Flouting Maxim of Manner	M	3	6.8%
		F	5	11.3%
Total			44	100%

Based on the findings, a total of 44 instances of flouting maxims were identified in the movie. The most frequently flouted maxim for female character is quantity, accounting for 27.2% of all cases, followed by quality, relation, and manner, while male characters most flouted maxim is maxim of relation, accounting for 13.6%, followed by quantity and manner. Female characters flouted the maxims more frequently than male characters, showing a tendency to elaborate or provide excessive information during interactions.

Table 2. Strategies of Flouting Maxim

No.	Strategies	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Giving Too Little Information	M	1	2.2%
		F	3	6.8%
2.	Giving Too Much Information	M	4	9%
		F	7	15.9%
3.	Hyperbole	M	0	0%
		F	3	6.8%
4.	Metaphor	M	0	0%
		F	0	0%
5.	Irony	M	0	0%
		F	1	2.2%

		M	0	0%
6.	Banter	F	1	2.2%
		M	6	13.6%
7.	Irrelevant Statement	F	9	20.4%
		M	3	6.8%
8.	Ambiguous Statement	F	6	13.6%
	Total		44	100%

Table 2 summarizes the strategies used by both genders in flouting the maxims. The analysis reveals that irrelevant statement is the most common strategy among both female characters (20.4%) and male characters (13.6%). Some strategies, such as hyperbole, irony, and banter, are absent in male speech but appear in female communication, however, the metaphor strategy are both absent for both genders. These patterns suggest gender-based differences in expressing implied meanings and maintaining conversational styles.

Flouting a maxim can take several forms according to Grice's four conversational maxims, quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Flouting maxims shows how people often use language creatively to convey indirect meanings. While it can enrich communication, it may also cause misunderstandings if the listener fails to infer the speaker's true intention. Flouting a maxim does not occur by chance; it often follows certain communicative strategies. Cutting (2002) identifies eight strategies for flouting maxims: giving too little information, giving too much information, hyperbole, metaphor, irony, banter, irrelevant statements, and ambiguity. Each serves to convey implied meanings beyond literal expression.

Maxim Flouted and the Strategies by Female Characters

The female characters in *Barbie* (2023) flouted all four types of maxims, quantity, quality, relation, and manner, through various strategies, including giving too little information, giving too much information, hyperbole, irony, banter, irrelevant statement, and ambiguous statement. The following dialogues illustrate how these strategies are employed in the female characters' utterances throughout the movie.

BARBIE RITU: "How come you're so amazing?"

BARBIE ISSA: "No comment! No, seriously, no comment"

In this dialogue, Barbie Issa flouts the maxim of relation by responding to a compliment with, "No comment! No, seriously, no comment." Instead of giving a relevant reply, she uses the strategy of giving an irrelevant statement, shifting the topic humorously to avoid direct engagement. This response reflects a playful modesty, often associated with female conversational styles that deflect self-praise. While the repetition adds humor and keeps the tone light, it limits emotional connection, resulting in a surface-level interaction rather than a meaningful exchange.

Other instances of flouting maxims along with the strategies employed by female characters are presented in the following dialogues.

KEN RYAN GOSLING: "Hey, Barbie. Can I come over later?"

BARBIE MARGOT: "Yeah, OK. I don't have anything big planned, just a giant blow-out party with all the Barbies, with planned choreography and a bespoke song. But you can stop by, sure."

In this scene, Barbie Margot flouts the maxim of quantity when responding to Ken Ryan Gosling's question about coming over. Instead of a short answer, she gives an exaggerated reply with unnecessary details: "Yeah, OK. I don't have anything big planned, just a giant blow-out party with all the Barbies..." This reflects the strategy of giving too much information, where Barbie provides excessive detail to soften her hesitation and maintain politeness. Her response shows a typical female communication pattern that values social connection and indirectness, yet it creates mixed signals that leave Ken unsure of her true intention.

BARBIE HARI: "Isn't it the best day ever?!"

BARBIE MARGOT: "It IS the best day ever! And so is yesterday, and so is tomorrow, and so is the day after tomorrow, and even Wednesdays and every day from now until FOREVER!"

This scene shows Barbie Margot flouts the maxim of quality by giving an exaggerated response, claiming that every day is "the best ever." Her statement is not meant literally but serves as a hyperbole strategy, emphasizing her excitement and emotional connection with Barbie Hari. This overstatement reflects a common tendency among female characters to express enthusiasm vividly, reinforcing social warmth and shared joy. While it heightens the positive tone of their exchange, it departs from factual truth, making the statement playful rather than sincere.

The following dialogues also demonstrate various ways in which female characters flouted the maxims through different strategies.

WEIRD BARBIE: "What can I do you for?"

BARBIE MARGOT: "I had to come see you about -- My feet -- they're um..."

In this scene, Barbie Margot flouts the maxim of quantity by giving too little information in response to Weird Barbie's question. Her hesitant and incomplete reply, "I had to come see you about... my feet... they're um..." illustrates the giving too little information strategy, where she withholds the full explanation out of nervousness. This brief and vague response reflects how female characters may become indirect or restrained when feeling uneasy. Barbie Margot's hesitation conveys vulnerability and internal conflict rather than disinterest, subtly revealing her discomfort. The strategy deepens the emotional tone of the exchange, highlighting her anxiety and uncertainty about her own situation.

BARBIE MARGOT: "Yeah. Can you fix them?"

WEIRD BARBIE: "You're Stereotypical Barbie, aren't you?"

This exchange shows Weird Barbie flouts the maxim of relation by responding with an irrelevant statement instead of addressing Barbie Margot's question. When asked whether something could be fixed, she replies, "You're Stereotypical Barbie, aren't you?", demonstrating the giving irrelevant statement strategy. Rather than staying on topic, her response shifts the focus from a practical concern to Barbie Margot's identity. This redirection reflects a common conversational pattern among female characters who prioritize emotional or relational

meaning over directness. Weird Barbie's remark reframes the moment from a simple problem-solving exchange into a deeper reflection on identity and self-awareness. The strategy adds emotional depth but interrupts the logical flow of the conversation.

The dialogues from *Barbie* (2023) reveal how the female characters flouted all four of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, quantity, quality, relation, and manner. According to Cutting (2002), flouting a maxim occurs when a speaker intentionally disobeys conversational norms to convey an implied meaning. In this film, the female characters employ various flouting strategies, such as giving too little information, giving too much information, hyperbole, irony, banter, irrelevant statements, and ambiguous expressions. These strategies reveal not only the characters' attempts to challenge societal expectations but also their ways of asserting agency and emotional depth through language.

Maxim Flouted and the Strategies by Male Characters

The male characters in *Barbie* (2023) flouted only three types of maxims, quantity, relation, and manner, through various strategies, including giving too little information, giving too much information, irrelevant statements, and ambiguous statements. The following dialogues illustrate how these strategies are employed in the male characters' utterances throughout the movie.

KEN RYAN GOSLING: "You don't even know how to beach your SELF off. How are you going to beach all of us off??"

KEN SIMU: **"Why are you getting emotional?!"**

In this scene, Ken Simu flouts the maxim of relation by using the irrelevant statement strategy. When Ken Ryan Gosling challenges him with "How are you going to beach all of us off?", Ken Simu replies, "Why are you getting emotional?!", a comment unrelated to the question. Instead of addressing the challenge directly, he diverts attention to Ken Ryan's emotional tone. This act reflects a typical male conversational tendency to deflect emotional engagement and reassert dominance by framing emotion as weakness. The irrelevant response heightens the tension and shifts the focus from competition to personal criticism, showing how flouting the maxim of relation can transform a logical exchange into a power-driven confrontation.

AN EVEN YOUNGER MATTEL EMPLOYEE: "What?! When?!"

AARON DINKINS: **"About ten years ago, a woman named Skipper turned up in Key West at some family's home and asked to babysit the kids... She then tried to take their toddler surfing. We were able to straighten it out and keep it under wraps. But this is serious."**

This exchange shows Aaron Dinkins flouts the maxim of quantity by using the giving too much information strategy. When a young Mattel employee asks, "What?! When?", Aaron responds with an extended backstory: "About ten years ago, a woman named Skipper turned up in Key West..." instead of providing a simple answer. His overly detailed explanation goes beyond what is necessary, turning a short reply into a narrative. This reflects a male conversational pattern where elaboration is used to display knowledge or authority. While his long response adds dramatic weight, it disrupts conversational efficiency and overwhelms the listener, who only sought a straightforward time reference.

Other examples illustrating how male characters flouted the maxims and employed specific strategies appear in the following excerpts.

AARON DINKINS: "Dinkins. Um, is Barbie Land like an alternate reality or like our imaginations come to life or...?"

ALL OF THE EXECUTIVES: "Yes."

This scene shows Aaron Dinkins asking a complex question to The Executives, both male characters. Instead of giving a detailed answer, The Executives respond only with "Yes," flouting the maxim of quantity by providing too little information. Their brief reply suggests avoidance and unwillingness to engage in the complicated topic. Using the giving too little information strategy, they minimize response to maintain control and avoid responsibility. This reflects a gendered pattern where men, especially in professional settings, use minimal speech to assert authority or distance themselves from emotional depth. The short answer adds humor through understatement but also highlights how corporate males use brevity to display dominance and detachment.

LIFE-GUARD: "Oh, so you want to be a lifeguard?"

KEN RYAN GOSLING: "Oh, I'm not trained to go over there. I'm trained to stand confidently over here."

In this exchange, Ken Ryan Gosling flouts the maxim of relation by responding irrelevantly to the lifeguard's direct question about becoming a lifeguard. Instead of giving a clear yes or no, he says, "Oh I'm not trained to go over there. I'm trained to stand confidently over here," using the irrelevant response strategy. His reply diverts attention from the topic to his sense of confidence, creating humor while avoiding the truth about his lack of skill. This reflects a male communication pattern where confidence is used to mask insecurity and maintain control. By prioritizing image over clarity, Ken Ryan Gosling humorously reinforces masculine self-assurance at the expense of conversational relevance.

SASHA: "Where can we find Barbie?"

ALLAN: "There's only one place she'd be."

This dialogue shows Allan flouts the maxim of manner by responding to Sasha's direct question with an ambiguous statement strategy. When asked, "Where can we find Barbie?", he replies, "There's only one place she'd be," which avoids giving a clear location. His vague and mysterious phrasing obscures meaning and forces Sasha to infer his intention. This kind of indirectness often reflects how male characters use ambiguity to project composure or control within a conversation. While the response adds a dramatic tone and suspense, it reduces communicative efficiency and may cause confusion. Thus, Allan's ambiguous answer demonstrates a flouting of the maxim of manner, prioritizing style and dominance over clarity.

The dialogues from *Barbie* (2023) reveal how the male characters flouted three of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, quantity, relation, and manner, to reflect their communicative style and social positioning within the narrative. According to Cutting (2002), flouting a maxim occurs when a speaker deliberately violates conversational norms to convey an implied or indirect meaning. In this film, the male characters employ several flouting strategies, including giving too little information, giving too much information, irrelevant statements, and ambiguous expressions. These strategies highlight how male characters' speech tends to reflect dominance, avoidance, or detachment in conversation, contrasting with the expressiveness

observed in female characters.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the flouting of conversational maxims and the strategies used by male and female characters in the *Barbie* (2023) movie through a gender-based lens. Based on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research identified all four types of maxims being flouted, quantity, quality, relation, and manner, across 44 excerpts. The findings revealed that the maxim of quantity was the most frequently flouted by female characters, while the maxim of relation was most commonly flouted by male characters. In terms of strategies, both genders most often used the irrelevant statement strategy, while metaphor was not found in any excerpt. These results indicate that gender influences how conversational maxims are flouted and how communication styles are expressed. Overall, the study shows that flouting maxims in *Barbie* reflects the intersection of pragmatic choices and gendered communication patterns, emphasizing that language use in interaction is both cooperative and socially influenced.

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