

Flouting, Implicatures, and Hedges in Contemporary Media Discourse: A Gricean Pragmatic Analysis of Selected *Tiktok* Shorts

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Abstract

This study explores how real-life and fictional dialogues in popular media employ pragmatic strategies that both align with and subvert Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975). Through a qualitative analysis of selected excerpts from The Lion King (2019), Frozen (2013), and celebrity interviews featuring Andrew Garfield and Jackson Wang, the paper examines how the maxims of quality, relevance, and manner are flouted, hedged, or indirectly manipulated to produce layered meaning. Findings reveal that speakers use implicature, hedging, and maxim flouting not as communicative failures but as intentional tools for managing social relationships, protecting face, expressing philosophical stances, or complying with professional constraints. For instance, Timon and Pumbaa's "Hakuna Matata" reflects a reorientation of truth from factual accuracy to existential authenticity; Elsa's veiled disapproval illustrates implicature functioning as a face-saving strategy; Kristoff's use of "hopefully" exemplifies hedging for politeness and risk management. Meanwhile, Andrew Garfield's ironic denial and Jackson Wang's culturally sensitive deflection showcase strategic relevance manipulation in public discourse. The study underscores the enduring relevance of Gricean pragmatics in understanding how meaning is contextually negotiated and socially embedded in contemporary audiovisual texts. It also highlights the pedagogical potential of using popular media as a resource for teaching and analyzing pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Grice's Maxims, Pragmatics, Flouting, Cooperative Principle, Conversational Analysis.

A. Introduction

In an era where digital platforms proliferate and audiovisual media dominate global discourse, the boundaries between entertainment and linguistic education have increasingly blurred. Popular films and celebrity interviews, often dismissed as trivial, are in fact rich with pragmatic insights—especially when examined through the lens of

Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975). This study foregrounds how selected dialogues from animated films and celebrity appearances subtly challenge, observe, or manipulate Grice's conversational maxims—namely, quality, relevance, and manner—to create nuanced meaning, social humor, and cultural commentary.

Herbert Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle laid a foundational framework in pragmatics, emphasizing that speakers generally adhere to conversational maxims to facilitate effective and meaningful communication. The four maxims—quantity, quality, relevance (relation), and manner—help describe how interlocutors manage information and implicature (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996). However, as this paper illustrates, meaning is often not found in strict adherence to these maxims but rather in their intentional violation or strategic flouting, particularly in contexts where performance, secrecy, or emotion is at play (Cutting, 2002; Thomas, 1995).

Through a close analysis of selected excerpts from *The Lion King* (2019), *Frozen* (2013), and celebrity interviews featuring Andrew Garfield and Jackson Wang, this paper illustrates the pragmatic complexity embedded in media language. The linguistic phenomena observed—ranging from implicatures to hedging and maxim flouting—demonstrate how meaning can be implicitly communicated, strategically withheld, or playfully subverted in various social contexts (Mey, 2001).

In *The Lion King* (2019), the iconic phrase "Hakuna Matata," sung by Timon and Pumbaa, exemplifies a playful reversal of the Maxim of Quality. While the utterance is technically honest—"Hakuna Matata means no worries"—the deeper implication stretches beyond mere translation. The song, rich in backstory and philosophy, introduces Simba not only to a phrase but to a worldview. This moment represents a complex interplay between literal truth and worldview promotion, suggesting that while the maxim is ostensibly followed, its philosophical implications subtly exceed mere factuality (Dynel, 2008).

Similarly, *Frozen* (2013) offers two compelling pragmatic phenomena. In the first scene analyzed, Queen Elsa responds to her sister Anna's rushed marriage announcement not with direct disapproval, but with guarded skepticism: "You can't marry a man you just met." The implicature here is rich—Elsa's judgment is implied rather than directly expressed, aligning with Grice's concept of conversational implicature (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). Rather than violating a maxim, she leverages the implicitness of language to convey caution while maintaining interpersonal tact. The second example from the same film involves Kristoff's line, "There's twenty feet of fresh powder down there, it'll be like landing on a pillow. Hopefully." The insertion of "hopefully" functions as a hedge—an explicit marker of uncertainty that serves to soften the commitment to the preceding claim. This hedge, related to the Maxim of Manner, highlights how speakers preserve face and acknowledge risk through linguistic cushioning (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 2010).

Celebrity interviews, often characterized by performative language and strategic ambiguity, further illustrate maxim flouting. In a notable example from *The Tonight Show*, Andrew Garfield addresses a leaked image from *Spider-Man: No Way Home* with the statement, "I did see it, and it's a Photoshop." While appearing to comply with the Maxim of Quality, Garfield's tone and contextual cues (e.g., his sarcastic "Oh, how

convenient, Detective Fallon") signal an intentional breach. His audience, aware of the underlying promotional secrecy, understands that this denial is more performative than factual. This moment underscores the pragmatic principle that meaning is co-constructed, not simply conveyed, and that truthfulness in language often operates under negotiated social expectations (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Attardo, 1993).

A similar pragmatic maneuver is evident in Jackson Wang's response to a question about how many children he wants: "It depends on my wife. As a man, as a boy, it's not up to us." Here, the Maxim of Relevance is flouted—not to mislead, but to reframe the question within a broader sociocultural discourse on gender roles and decision-making in relationships. Wang's response subtly redirects the topic, avoiding personal exposure while maintaining politeness and cultural sensitivity. Rather than seeing this as conversational evasion, it can be interpreted as a discursive strategy to assert values and deflect intrusive questioning (Cutting, 2002; Holmes, 2013).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that popular media and celebrity discourse are fertile grounds for pragmatic analysis. They reveal how implicature, hedging, and maxim flouting serve various communicative functions—from humor and secrecy to politeness and ideological positioning. Moreover, they illustrate the enduring relevance of Grice's framework in analyzing language use not only in academic or formal settings but also in everyday entertainment that reflects and shapes public discourse.

This study thus affirms that Gricean pragmatics, far from being confined to theoretical linguistics, remains vital in interpreting the subtle intricacies of meaning in contemporary media texts. It also underscores the pedagogical potential of integrating such media examples into linguistic analysis, thereby bridging academic insight with cultural literacy.

This paper aims to identify, categorize, and analyze a range of real-life and fictional dialogues that exemplify both adherence to and violations of Grice's conversational maxims. The analysis draws on brief excerpts from selected TikTok short videos, focusing on how these moments reflect the pragmatic strategies employed by speakers—whether consciously or unconsciously—in both everyday interactions and performative contexts. Central to this investigation is not only what is explicitly stated, but also what is implied, suggested, or intentionally left unsaid. In 1975, philosopher H. P. Grice introduced the Cooperative Principle, accompanied by four conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relevance, and manner—intended to facilitate clear and effective communication. These maxims encourage speakers to provide sufficient information, to speak truthfully, to remain relevant, and to express themselves in a clear and orderly manner. However, especially within the realm of media and popular culture, these principles are frequently flouted or strategically altered. Such deviations are not arbitrary; rather, they serve a range of communicative functions, from generating humor and managing politeness to expressing emotion and conveying subtle social cues through indirect means.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method situated within the broader framework of pragmatic analysis, with particular attention to the theoretical model proposed by H. P. Grice in his Cooperative Principle (1975). Grice's model, which articulates the conversational maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner, provides the foundational lens through which this research examines how meaning is constructed, implied, negotiated, or deliberately flouted in contemporary media discourse. This investigation focuses specifically on the manipulation of the maxims of quality, relevance, and manner, alongside the use of conversational implicature and hedging as pragmatic strategies within selected spoken interactions.

The data for this study comprises five curated excerpts from popular media, all featuring authentic spoken dialogue obtained from publicly available TikTok clips. These include scenes from animated films such as *The Lion King* (2019) and *Frozen* (2013), as well as televised celebrity interviews featuring Andrew Garfield and Jackson Wang. The selection of these texts was purposive; excerpts were chosen based on their potential to exemplify core pragmatic phenomena—namely, maxim flouting, hedging, and implicature—in rich, context-sensitive ways. The intention was not to generate generalizations but to provide detailed interpretive insights into how pragmatic strategies manifest in real-world media discourse.

Each clip was transcribed verbatim, preserving the original phrasing, prosodic features, and informal nuances of the speakers to maintain authenticity. The transcripts were then segmented into conversational turns, enabling close scrutiny of interactional flow and speaker intent. Where applicable, transcripts were cross-verified with official video sources outside of TikTok to ensure accuracy and contextual completeness.

In analyzing the data, the study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in Gricean theory. Each dialogue segment was coded in relation to one or more pragmatic categories. Instances adhering to or deviating from the Maxim of Quality were noted particularly when speakers either stated something evidently false or implied untruthfulness through irony or exaggeration. The Maxim of Relevance was examined in exchanges where responses appeared tangential, evasive, or strategically shifted the conversational focus. The Maxim of Manner was explored in utterances that demonstrated hedging, indirectness, or intentional ambiguity. Furthermore, the analysis took account of conversational implicatures—where speakers suggested meanings not explicitly stated—and hedging strategies, which served as face-saving mechanisms or expressions of uncertainty.

Each utterance was examined from multiple dimensions: its literal propositional content, the immediate situational context, the speaker's intended communicative effect, and the inferential work required of the hearer based on shared social or cultural knowledge. These layered dimensions were critical for unpacking the pragmatic richness of each interaction, particularly given that much of the meaning in spoken discourse lies not in what is said, but in how it is said—and what is left unsaid.

The interpretive procedure involved several stages. First, each clip was transcribed using standard orthographic conventions. Second, the dialogues were broken down into discrete conversational turns for clearer analysis. Third, each turn was categorized based

on the specific pragmatic features it displayed—be it maxim flouting, implicature, hedging, or otherwise. Fourth, the utterances were interpreted within their broader interactional and cultural contexts, drawing on existing pragmatic theory to explain the function and effect of the speech acts. Finally, these interpretations were validated through engagement with peer-reviewed literature that addresses similar phenomena, thereby grounding the analysis in established academic discourse.

It is important to acknowledge that this study is confined to a micro-analytic, qualitative focus and does not seek to represent all forms of media communication. Rather, it presents a set of illustrative case studies designed to demonstrate the applicability of Gricean pragmatics in analyzing contemporary media texts. While the data were sourced from TikTok—a platform shaped by specific performative conventions and algorithmic visibility—the primary concern of the study is the linguistic content of the speech acts, rather than platform-specific dynamics.

Lastly, the study recognizes the semiotic richness of audiovisual media, including tone, facial expression, and gesture. However, in line with the scope of pragmatic analysis, the primary focus here remains on the verbal dimension of meaning-making, specifically how speakers construct, imply, or subvert meanings through the use or flouting of conversational norms as theorized by Grice.

C. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the selected excerpts from popular media reveals a variety of pragmatic phenomena aligned with Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), particularly the flouting and manipulation of the maxims of quality, relevance, and manner, as well as the use of conversational implicatures and hedging. These linguistic strategies serve different communicative purposes, ranging from humor and philosophical framing to face-saving, ambiguity, and personal boundary maintenance. Each instance reflects a purposeful deviation from literal meaning, allowing characters or speakers to convey subtler social, emotional, or ideological meanings.

In the excerpt from *The Lion King* (2019), Timon and Pumbaa's iconic phrase “Hakuna Matata” appears, on the surface, to adhere to the Maxim of Quality by offering a direct translation—“no worries.” However, the context in which it is sung reveals a more complex layer of meaning. Rather than merely providing truthful information, the characters share their life philosophy through song, embedding emotional resonance and narrative history. While they are not deceiving Simba, the interaction reflects a reversal of the maxim's conventional expectation of objectivity. By blending truth with personal worldview, they subtly challenge the maxim's empiricist foundation. This finding demonstrates that in performative or artistic contexts, truthfulness may be reframed as emotional or existential authenticity rather than strictly factual accuracy.

The analysis of *Frozen* (2013) uncovers multiple instances of conversational implicature and pragmatic softening. In the scene where Anna announces her engagement to Prince Hans, Elsa's response—“You can't marry a man you just met”—is a classic example of conversational implicature. Rather than issuing a direct prohibition or insult, Elsa indirectly conveys her skepticism and disapproval. The implicature arises from shared background knowledge and social norms regarding

relationships. Her reluctance to directly state her objection preserves the social face of her sister while still delivering a powerful pragmatic message. This supports Grice's notion that speakers may intentionally withhold explicit content to achieve interpersonal or rhetorical goals.

Another example from *Frozen* illustrates hedging as a strategy related to the Maxim of Manner. Kristoff's line—"There's twenty feet of fresh powder down there, it'll be like landing on a pillow. Hopefully."—contains the hedge "hopefully," which serves to mitigate the strength of the preceding claim. The hedge introduces a layer of epistemic uncertainty, acknowledging the possibility of error without undermining the speaker's general optimism. This instance underscores the pragmatic function of hedges in allowing speakers to appear confident yet cautious, and to signal tentativeness without abandoning their communicative aims. As Brown and Levinson (1987) have argued, such strategies serve as face-saving devices, particularly in situations of potential physical or social risk.

The clip featuring Andrew Garfield on *The Tonight Show* offers a compelling case of intentional flouting of the Maxim of Quality. In response to Jimmy Fallon's question about a leaked Spider-Man photo, Garfield claims that the image is "a Photoshop," despite later revelations confirming its authenticity. His tone—marked by sarcasm and playful irony in phrases like "Oh, how convenient, Detective Fallon"—invites the audience to recognize the insincerity of his denial. Rather than deceiving the audience in a manipulative way, Garfield leverages shared knowledge of media secrecy to create a humorous and self-aware performance. This interaction exemplifies how maxim flouting can be used strategically in celebrity discourse to balance contractual secrecy obligations with audience engagement. It also reinforces Grice's claim that successful communication often relies on the hearer's ability to infer speaker intent beyond literal content.

A further example of maxim flouting is seen in Jackson Wang's response to a direct question about how many children he would like. Rather than providing a numerical answer, he replies, "It depends on my wife. As a man, as a boy, it's not up to us." This response flouts the Maxim of Relevance, not by producing irrelevant information, but by reorienting the question's frame of reference. Wang shifts the focus from personal preference to relational and cultural deference, thereby avoiding a definitive answer while signaling respect for spousal equality. This act of flouting is socially motivated and contextually appropriate, reinforcing that pragmatic choices are not only linguistic but also ideological. As noted by Yule (1996), relevance in conversation is contextually determined and can be manipulated for various interpersonal purposes.

D. Conclusion

The findings reveal that pragmatic strategies such as implicature, hedging, and maxim flouting are not merely violations of conversational norms but rather sophisticated tools for managing meaning, emotion, and social positioning. The use of these strategies in both fictional and real-life media contexts highlights the dynamic and

socially embedded nature of communication. Grice's maxims, while prescriptive in theory, are shown in practice to be flexible resources that speakers may adapt, bend, or subvert to achieve nuanced communicative goals.

E. References

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