



AN ANALYSIS OF MAXIM VIOLATION IN SITUATIONAL COMEDY

THE BIG BANG THEORY

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Abstract

In an effective and efficient communication, speakers and listeners are required to work together to build a good conversation by considering the principles proposed by HP Grice in 1975. He categorizes the maxim into four types, namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation and maxim of manner. This paper tries to find out the maxim violations and characters' reason to violate it in "*The Big Bang Theory*" situational comedy season 11. Qualitative method was used for this research. The result shows that there were 140 violated utterances found in 336 scenes from 12 episodes: violation of maxim quantity (31.4%), violation of maxim quality (17.1%), violation of maxim relation (27.8%), violation of maxim of manner (20%), and multiple maxim violation (3.5%). Also, the researcher found that some indicators to identify the reason of maxim violation based on the guidelines from Tupan and Natalia (2008) and Christoffersen (2005) were not found such as avoiding to hurt the hearer, building one's believe, and convincing the hearer (violation of maxim quality), Do the wrong causality (violation of maxim relation), and voice is not loud enough (violation of maxim manner).

Key words: *Maxim Violation, Sitcom TBBT*

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is an important communication device for people because it plays such an important role in social interaction. Sirbu (2015: 405) argues that language is essentially a means of communication among the members of a society. People use language as a tool of communication to say their wants, messages, information, and ideas to other people (Indra, 2018: 98).

Based on the role of language as a communicating device, it is used to discuss a topic in order to achieve various objectives that involve at least one

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speaker and one listener (called a conversation) in which the speaker wants to be understood and the addressee wants to understand (Rosa, 2013: 151). Conversations will be considered successful if the listener catches the message conveyed by the speaker. This means that the participants should not share information that confuses, deceives, or gives irrelevant information (Yule, 1996: 35). Therefore, speakers should pay attention to the principles that apply in communication in order to make a conversation work properly. To understand the intention and purpose of the speaker, the listener should make the right contribution, clear and coherent according to the purpose of the speaker. Grice (1975: 45) claims such principle as cooperative principle that consists of four maxims, namely maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner which were formulated as follows:

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation: Be relevant.

Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), be orderly.

In the phenomenon of language, the violation of maxims occurs when speakers do not obey the cooperative principle. For example, the listener cannot understand the information in detail if the speaker gives incomplete information. In contrast, if the speaker gives more information, the listener can understand the information, but it is considered ineffective and useless in order to convey certain intentions.

Violations of maxims can be found in “*The Big Bang Theory*” sitcom. *The Big Bang Theory* created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady that airs on the American television network CBS. This sitcom (situational comedy) tells the story of four young physicists named Leonard Hofstadter, Sheldon Cooper, Raj Koothrappali, Howard Wolowitz. Not only do they work as physicists, they are also very fond of video games, comics, and science fiction films.

There are several studies related to this research. First, the study was conducted by Hu (2012) entitled *An Analysis of Humor in the Big Bang Theory from Pragmatic Perspective*. This study analyzes the verbal humor in the *Big Bang Theory* within the framework of the cooperative principles and the relevance theory. The findings showed that the verbal humor occurs when the listener cannot draw inference or may not fully understand the utterance from the speaker that cause conflict during communication. Also, verbal humor also came from the contrast between maximal relevance in communication.

Second, Izaias (2011) conducted a study entitled *The analysis of irony through relevance theory in The Big Bang Theory sitcom*. This study reviewed the relevance theory proposed by Sperber and Wilson. In addition, this study described the figure of speech irony to demonstrate how utterances are

understood between characters and audience and how irony is largely used as humorous framework. The findings showed that irony and relevance theory can work together and the verbal irony was the most predominant in the *The Big Bang Theory*.

Third, Rohmawati and Yuliasri (2017) did a research entitled Violation of Politeness Maxims in the Television Series *The Big Bang Theory*. This study was about analyzing the types of politeness maxims were violated by the speakers, the purposes of the violation, and to evaluate the effects of politeness maxims in the conversation. This research found 12 kinds of purposes of violation made by the characters: warning, advising, admonishing, requesting, suggesting, urging, offering, insisting, alleging, boasting, refusing, and condoling. The use of utterances manner in the conversation is very important to reach the major purpose of the politeness and the goal of the communication can be adhered.

The next studied conducted by Ning, Caixia, and Yuan (2018) entitled *An Analysis of Humor in The Big Bang Theory Based on The Cooperative Principles*. This study was about investigating and analyzing the humorous effect caused by the violation of the cooperative principles in people's daily communication. The finding showed that humorous effect cause by violating one certain or more maxims of cooperative principles to a certain degree. Nevertheless, the violation of cooperative principles does not necessarily mean that the communication cannot be continued.

Last, Mahdalikova (2014) observed a study entitled *A Discourse Analysis of the American Sitcom The Big Bang Theory: The Instruction of a Geek Identity*. This study was aimed to analyze the construction of the identity of characters of the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* known as geek. The analysis was based on the corpus material that consists of the transcripts of season 1 and 6 of the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. The analysis reveals that the geeks tent to talk about the topics that are less common in everyday speech, such as the science of the technology, and thus also use less colloquial language.

The researcher proposes to conduct analyses entitled “An Analysis of Maxim Violation in Situational Comedy “*The Big Bang Theory*”. The research focuses on the violation of four maxims (maxim of quality, quantity, relation, and manner) and the multiple violation found based on Grice's theory of Cooperative Principles. In addition, the characters' reasons in violating the maxims were observed based on Tupan and Natalia (2008) and Christoffersen (2005). Therefore, this research is expected to help the reader to understand the sitcom “*The Big Bang Theory Season 11*”. Also, this research is estimated to give contribution to the development of Pragmatic as the references to other researcher, specifically, in cooperative principle involving the conversational maxims by H.P Grice 1975.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research study was designed to be qualitative. According to Polkinghorne (1983: 269), qualitative method depends on linguistics rather than numerical data (scores), and using meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis. In this study, the descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because the analysis was about finding and analyzing utterances of the characters in “*The Big Bang Theory Season 11*”. Besides, the researcher tried to understand the context of the conversation to know the reasons why the characters violate the maxims. This study provides a descriptive account of selected utterances by the characters of Big Bang Theory.

The data in this research were taken from “*The Big Bang Theory*” Film script. The researcher downloaded the 24 episodes script of “*The Big Bang Theory*” from https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/episode_scripts.php?tv-show=big-bang-theory&season=11. Next, the researcher observed the script and marked the utterances that consist of the violation of maxim. After observing the script, the researcher discovers many violations related to language phenomena against the cooperative principle with various purposes and reasons. Then, analysis of data based on H.P. Grice theory was done to find out whether it was categorized as violation maxim of quantity, quality, relation, manner, and multiple maxim. After that, the selected data were put into table for each category: maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner to draw conclusion.

Previous Related Studies

The first study was conducted by Adriani (2013) entitled *Comparison of the Maxim Violation Found in Action and Drama Movies*. This was a study of comparing maxim violation of action movie “Charlie’s Angels” and drama movie “The Pacifier”. The finding showed that the main characters in these two movies were violated the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. The maxim of quantity was the most violated in Charlie’s Angels movie (35.85%) and The Pacifier movie (37.5%).

The second study was conducted by Rahmi (2018) with the title *The Violation of Conversational Maxims Found in Political Conversation at Rosi Talkshow*. In this study, she discovered types of conversational maxims violation and the reason of the interviewee violate the maxims in *Rosi Talkshow* at Kompas TV. The results of the study show that the four maxims of the cooperative principle were violated by the interviewee in answering the question at *Rosi Talkshow*. The dominant maxim that is violated is maxim of quantity which occurred 18 times because the speakers give information as much as possible to make it clear and to create good image with good words to get sympathy from audiences.

Another study was done by Agusmita (2018) with the title *An Analysis of Conversational Maxim Violation Found in “The Monster House” Movie Script*. In this study, she analyzed maxim violation by finding out the type of maxims which was mostly violated in the *The Monster House* movie script. She found that there were 54 utterances which violated the conversational

maxim and the type of maxim that was mostly violated in the script of *The Monster House* movie was maxim of relation.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

From the 336 scenes, researcher found 140 data of maxim violations based on H.P Grice theory. Then, each violation found was classified into its appropriate types of maxim. The data of maxim violation of four maxims were analyzed in detail in the following examples.

a. Violation of Maxim Quantity

Datum 8

Situation : Sheldon and Amy got home from dinner with Amy's colleagues (Ep 1 scene 4).

Amy	: <i>You know, these are my colleagues and they want to talk about my work. Why does that bother you so much?</i>
Sheldon	: <i>Because I was there. It's like having Optimus Prime over to dinner and not asking him to turn into a truck.</i>

Analysis:

After Sheldon and Amy having dinner in a restaurant with Amy's colleagues, Sheldon argued to Amy about her colleagues being rude to him. Sheldon pointed out her colleagues only interested in Amy rather than him. Amy felt confuse and asked Sheldon about the reason with the utterance "*You know, these are my colleagues and they want to talk about my work. Why does that bother you so much?*". Sheldon responded with "*Because I was there*" which meant Amy's colleagues should interested in him. Sheldon utterance had already required for Amy's question, but he added unnecessary information with the utterance "***It's like having Optimus Prime over to dinner and not asking him to turn into a truck***" and violated the maxim of quantity.

b. Violation of Maxim Quality

Datum 82

Situation : Sheldon came to Leonard's apartment and checked on a room and asked some questions to Leonard and Penny (Ep14 scene 5).

Leonard	: <i>That is our room now, and we're gonna turn it into a gym.</i>
Sheldon	: <i>Do you really expect me to believe that?</i>
Leonard	: <i>No.</i>
Penny	: <i>No.</i>

Analysis:

In this scene, Sheldon had an argument with Leonard and Penny about the room that was no longer used in Leonard’s apartment. Sheldon wanted to use the room for his research, but Leonard and Penny tried to reject Sheldon’s request because they didn’t want to be disturbed by Sheldon again. At the end, Leonard violated the maxim of quality by making statement “***That is our room now, and we're gonna turn it into a gym***” to convince Sheldon about the room and hope Sheldon to not stay at their apartment. But Sheldon’s response made Leonard and Penny admitted the truth, and Sheldon finally used the room by renting it.

c. Violation of Maxim Relation

Datum 75

Situation : Sheldon talked to Penny about his approach in physics (Ep 13 scene 13).

Sheldon	: <i>And then I was thinking about inventing a new dark matter particle to evade the omega baryon constraints, but that just seems like something anyone could come up with.</i>
Penny	: <i>Mm. Agreed. (clears throat) You know what's blowing my mind? Somebody thought about putting cheese in this crust.</i>

Analysis:

In this scene, Sheldon was doing research about his theory in physic and Penny came with a box of pizza into Sheldon’s room. Sheldon tried to give his opinion about his new approach in physics to Penny by saying “*And then I was thinking about inventing a new dark matter particle to evade the omega baryon constraints, but that just seems like something anyone could come up with.*” Penny first respond was with “*Mm. Agreed*” where he tried to agree with Sheldon’s opinion. But she used coughing expression at her next utterance to change the topic and said “***You know what's blowing my mind? Somebody thought about putting cheese in this crust***”, she tried to avoid the topic because Sheldon explained his opinion in complicated utterance which she cannot understand.

d. Violation of Maxim Manner

Datum 72

Situation : Sheldon doing some math test and called his mother (Ep 13 scene 9).

Sheldon	: <i>Did I actually do it? I did. I did. The answer is one in 18 million.</i>
Mom	: <i>What is?</i>
Sheldon	: <i>The odds of you running into Mr. Watkins.</i>

Analysis:

In the scene, Sheldon wanted to do some new approach on physic, but he did not have any idea to start. Suddenly his mother called and told him about someone she met which is Mr. Watkins. After his mother called, Sheldon got an idea and continued his work. Sheldon called his mother and said “***The answer is one in 18 million***” which made confusion to his mother. There was a violation of maxim of manner in Sheldon’s utterances because he exaggerated about his mother meeting Mr. Watkins rather than doing his approach in physics. Because of that, Sheldon failed to fulfill the requirement of maxim of manner. As a sub-maxim of manner by saying “*I found a new approach in physics*” in Sheldon’s statement would give the clear explanation about the subject. Therefore, the datum 72 was included into violation maxim of manner.

e. Multiple Maxim Violation

Datum 54

Situation: Amy argued if Leonard mad at her (Ep 9 scene 10).

Penny	: <i>I cannot believe you're mad.</i>
Leonard	: <i>I'm not mad.</i>
Penny	: <i>Oh, really? Tell that to your eyebrows. Bet I could place a quarter between them, and it would just stay there.</i>
Leonard	: <i>Fine, I'm mad. I guess I was more upset by our breakup than you.</i>

Analysis:

From the conversation above maxim quality and quantity were violated. When Penny made a statement that Leonard was at her, Leonard tried to hide the truth from Penny by saying “***I'm not mad***” which violated the maxim of quality because one of sub maxim of conversational maxim assumed that the participant should have said something right in the conversation to make effective dialogue. Violation of maxim quantity can be seen in Penny’s utterance “***Oh, really? Tell that to your eyebrows. Bet I could place a quarter between them, and it would just stay there***”. In maxim of quantity the participant should give clear information and do not give the information less or more. Based on the Penny’s utterance she gave more information about what she thought from Leonard’s respond. Therefore the datum 102 is included into multiple maxim violation.

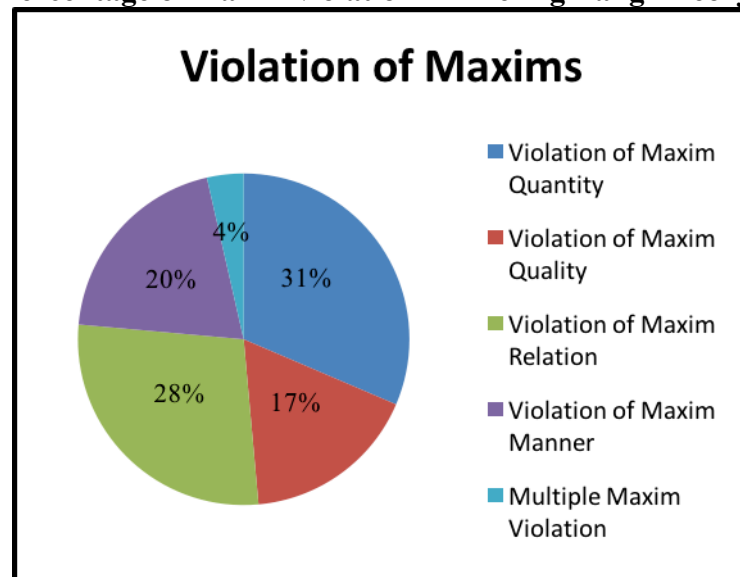
To determine the dominant violation of maxim and the characters’ reason based on Tupan and Natalia (2008) and Christoffersen (2005), the researcher represented it into a table as follows:

Table 1. Total data of maxim violation and its reasons

No	Maxim Violation	Category	Datum	Freq uency	Percent age
1	Quantity	Circumlocution or not to the point	37, 39, 44, 52, 61, 90, 97	7	5.00%
		Uninformative	8, 16, 1, 5, 12, 21, 28, 33, 49, 50, 55, 63, 64, 74, 77, 79, 85, 115, 122, 136	20	14.29%
		Talks too short	80, 81	2	1.43%
		Talks too much	56, 2, 22, 25, 39, 47, 73, 84, 88, 99, 106, 112, 117, 129	13	9.29%
		Repeat certain words	48, 133	2	1.43%
2	Quality	Hiding the truth	82, 124, 43, 68	4	2.86%
		Saving face	78, 92, 100, 105	4	2.86%
		Feeling jealous about something	91, 101, 103	3	2.14%
		Satisfying the hearer	125, 27, 53, 104, 121, 127, 131, 134, 140	9	6.43%
		Cheering the hearer	135, 86, 20, 46	4	2.86%
		Avoiding to hurt the hearer	-	-	0.00%
		Building one's believe	-	-	0.00%
Convincing the hearer	-	-	0.00%		
3	Relation	The conversation unmatched with the topic	10, 29, 3, 9, 14, 24, 26, 31, 35, 36, 38, 58, 71, 76, 83, 89, 107, 110, 138	19	13.57%
		Changes conversation topic abruptly	11, 23, 4, 19, 42, 87, 93, 94, 98, 118, 123	11	7.86%
		Avoids talking about something	75, 32, 60, 119, 126	5	3.57%
		Hides something or hides a fact	111, 59, 69, 116	4	2.86%
		Do the wrong causality	-	-	0.00%
4	Manner	Uses ambiguous language	34, 41, 15, 17, 18, 34, 57, 65, 66, 70, 96, 108, 130, 137, 139	15	10.71%
		Exaggerates thing	72, 7, 40, 45, 51, 67, 95, 109, 113, 114, 128, 142	12	8.57%
		Use slang in front of people who do not understand it	120	1	0.71%
		Voice is not loud enough	-	-	0.00%
5	Multiple	Relation & Quantity	6, 102, 141	3	2.14%
		Quality & Quantity	54	1	0.71%
		Manner & Quantity	62	1	0.71%
Total				140	100%

The explanation of the percentage for each category of maxim violation can be seen in figure 1 as follow:

Figure 1. Percentage of maxim violation in The Big Bang Theory Season 11



From figure 1, there were four maxims based on H.P Grice theory (maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation and maxim of manner) and additional multiple maxim violation found in 140 data. The violation of maxim quantity was 44 data (31.24%), the violation of quality was 24 data (17.14%), the violation of relation was 39 data (27.85%), violation of maxim manner in 28 data (20%), and violation of multiple maxim was 5 (3.57%). It can be concluded that the most dominant category of violation maxim used by the characters in sitcom *The Big Bang Theory Season 11* was the violation of maxim quantity (31.24%), followed by violation of maxim relation (27.85%), violation maxim of manner (20%), violation of maxim quality (17.14%), and the multiple maxim violation (3.57%).

2. Discussion

The discussion is drawn based on the data analysis results to answers the research questions. Violation of Paul Grice's maxims by the characters in "*The Big Bang Theory*" occurs consciously and sometimes unconsciously. In this case, the characters tend to violate the maxim of quantity. It can be proved since violation of maxim quantity is the most dominant data found comparing with three other types based on Grice theory.

The reason that violation of maxim quantity dominantly occur according to Rahmi (2018: 182) is to make clearly information to be understood with clarify and present the strongest information, so the speakers give information as much as possible to make it clear. So, the goal to create good image and get sympathy from other people can be successfully achieved.

Another reason why the characters violate the maxim of quantity based on Dornerus (2005: 11) because the characters try to emphasizes an opinion or situation in detail by giving additional information that is funny, but it is not needed in the conversation to make a point. This idea is in line with Karpenko

(1993) that the purpose of violating maxim is not to inform but to entertain the audience by making them to see what is behind one's utterances. So, humorous effect can occur as the unnecessary information given.

In addition of four violations of maxim, the characters of "*The Big Bang Theory*" did violation maxims by combining two or more maxims on their utterances at the same time. This finding is consistent with the idea of Tupan and Natalia (2008: 63-64) that multiple violations occur if the speaker violate more than one maxim at the same time and causing the hearer only comprehend the surface meaning through conversation. In this research, the multiple maxims found in "*The Big Bang Theory*" were the combination of violation maxim quantity and quality, quantity and relation, and quantity and manner.

In this research, some indicators to identify the reason in violating the four maxims by the characters based on Tupan and Natalia (2008) and Christoffersen (2005) are not found. The indicators that were not found can be seen in violation of maxim quality (avoiding to hurt the hearer, building one's believe, and convincing the hearer), violation of maxim relation (Do the wrong causality) and violation of maxim manner (voice is not loud enough).

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Big Bang Theory Season 11 created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady has 336 scenes in 24 episodes. From the 336 scenes, the researcher found 140 data that violated the four maxims: 44 data for quantity, 24 data for quality, 39 data for relation, and 29 data for manner. Violation of maxim quantity is the most violated maxim that occurs in the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*.

From the 140 data, the researcher conclude the category based the guidelines from Tupan and Natalia (2008) and Christoffersen (2005) to find out the reason in violating the maxims. From violation of maxim quantity, there are 7 data for circumlocution or not to the point, 20 data for uninformative, 2 data for talking to short, 13 data for talking too much, and 2 data for repeating certain words. In violation of maxim quality, there are 4 data for hide the truth, 4 data for safe face, 3 data for feel jealous about something, 9 data for satisfying the hearer, 4 data for cheer the hearer, and no datum for avoiding to hurt the hearer, building one's believe, and convincing the hearer. For violation of maxim relation, there are 19 data for unmatched conversation with the topic, 11 data for changing the conversation topic abruptly, 5 data for avoiding talking about something, 4 data for hiding something or fact, and no datum for do wrong causality. In violation of maxim manner, there are 15 data for using ambiguous language, 13 data for exaggerates thing, 1 datum for using slang in front of people who do not understand it, and no datum for not loud voice.

Hopefully, this finding would improve the understanding the maxim violation based on H.P. Grice cooperative principle and enable people to see what is behind one's utterances in *The Big Bang Theory Season 11*. Then, the researcher hopes that the results of the study will give more contribution in

Linguistics as the references to other researcher in cooperative principle involving the violation maxims by H.P Grice 1975.

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