

## **Flouting Maxims as a Sense of Humor in Indonesian Speech Acts**

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### ***Abstract:***

*The major objective of this research is to analyze the flouting maxims in one of the Indonesian comedy movies, The Guys. This research is focused on identifying the types of flouting maxims and to seek out the reasons behind those flouting performed by Alfi character in the movie. The data for this qualitative research were collected from the utterances produced by character Alfi containing flouting maxims. They were obtained by watching the movie and transcribing the movie script to ensure that no data were accidentally left out. The data was analyzed by classifying the data into types and reasons of flouting maxims, then the researcher verified all the data to ensure that all the data matched and correctly-translated. The results of this research show that character Alfi performed all types of flouting maxims, i.e. quantity, quality, relevance and manner. Flouting maxim of manner is in the highest occurrence and flouting maxim of relevance is in the lowest occurrence. Whereas the reasons that lead character Alfi to flout the maxims are competitive, convivial, collaborative and conflictive. Concerning the reasons of flouting maxims,*

*collaborative reason is in the highest position, and conflictive reason has the lowest position in its occurrence.*

**Keywords:** *character alfi, flouting maxim, movie the guys, pragmatics*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most basic tools for human to communicate is a language. This communication is commonly accomplished through a conversation by using spoken language. Banathy and Jenlink (2011, p. 83) state that conversation occurs when people speak together, and they are engaged in full of reflection and deliberation, which implies that the information transferred within conversation must be conceivable, hence, the conversation will run smoothly. In addition to the smoothness of a conversation, Yule (2010, p. 147) asserts that there is a specific rule that should be obeyed in making a conversation known as Cooperative Principle, which is originally proposed by Herbert Paul Grice. Additionally, Grice (1989, p. 26) proposes four conversational maxims (maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner) in order to make people's contribution appropriate to the conversation.

However, when we observe the communication that happened around us, it can be found that there were many people who did not obey this Grice's maxims in their conversation. Disobeying the rules of these maxims is usually called flouting (Attardo, 2017; Cutting, 2002; Mey, 1993; Thomas, 1995). When people intentionally flout the maxims, the inferences are created, which indicates that the speakers try to perform some tactics/strategies in order to make their hearers able to reveal the implied meaning behind their utterances (Levinson, 1983, p. 110). In other words, the flouting maxim is used by a speaker to convey an unstated meaning to the interlocutor (Cutting, 2002; Thomas, 1995; Mey, 1993). The example of flouting maxim extracted from Davies (2008) is provided below:

Suraj Partha : Are you going to tell your mom?

Eden Duncan : Being gay isn't something black people love to talk about.

From the conversation above, Eden is deciding not to tell his mother that he is a gay although there is no single sentence that says so. As a person who speaks the language, people have the ability to draw inferences about what is meant but not literally spoken. Thomas (1995, pp. 55–58) states that the information transferred in this way is known as a conversational implicature. He further explains that when speakers flout the maxims, they do actually not intend to mislead their hearer, but they want them to look for the conversational implicature. Andresen (2013, p. 28) also suggests that in order to create comedy movie, the conversational maxims may

be flouted. In comedy movie, therefore, most selected conversations tend to occur in the flouted maxims.

In Bahasa Indonesia, maxims are regularly floated. Previous research revealed that maxim of quantity was the most frequently floated maxim in a presidential interview (Fadhly, 2012), TV live talk (Herawati, 2013), and talkshow (Gustary & Dikramdhanie, 2018). However, research study on how maxim is floated in humorous conversation is lacking especially by Indonesian speakers. Therefore, this research was aimed at finding out what types of maxim are floated by the main character in *The Guys* movie, which is a comedy movie, to get an overview of how maxim is floated in Indonesian humorous conversation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Maxim flouting can happen in the real-life conversation or in a movie. Movie is seen as visual media of communication that tells a story which contain characters, object, locations and events (Vassiliou, 2006, p. 2), which suggests that movie is recorded based on the reflection of people's life, there must be frequent amounts of interactions done by the characters in the movie. Furthermore, Graham (1997, p. 117) says that the best thing a movie can ever give is it has the ability to record real people and all the events that happen around them. It is assumed that a movie can be one of the most convenient media for understanding people's conversation in real life.

The study of meaning dealing with context where people are speaking is regarded as pragmatics (Griffith, 2006, p. 6). It concerns with inferences that hearer made based on the context, because communication does not only depend on identifying the meaning of words in utterances, but also on recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances (Yule, 2010, p. 127). Therefore, studying pragmatics is inseparable from the context because it is a way to reveal the meaning behind the utterances (see, Finch 2003; Griffith 2006; Levinson 1983; Mey 1993). Context is defined as the relevant elements of social setting of a certain utterance (Leech, 1983, p. 13). In other words, it is a background knowledge that the speakers and hearers share in conveying and understanding their utterance.

In a conversation, the speakers can be considered successful in conveying their thought if the hearers are cooperative during its process (Nadar, 2009). Herbert Paul Grice is a British philosopher and a linguist who contribute in this conversational interaction in the early 1970s (Grandy & Warner, 2017). He develops four sub-principles of cooperative principle which are known as conversational maxims (Grice, 1989) namely maxim of quantity (deals with people's contribution in giving a required information), maxim of quality (expects people to tell the truth, or not to tell something which lack of adequate evidences), maxim of relevance (deals with people's contribution to be relevant to the topic of conversation) and maxim of manner (expects people to be clear and to avoid ambiguity during the conversation).

Whereas flouting maxim is one of the ways of failing to observe these maxims (Thomas, 1995, p. 64). It is one of the acts of being uncooperative in a conversation which has a purpose on making the hearer able to infer the implied meaning behind the speaker's utterance (Cutting, 2002; Mey, 1993; Winiharti, 2009). Levinson (1983, p. 110) explains that when people intentionally flout the maxims, the inferences are created, which indicate that the speakers try to perform some tactics/strategies to make their hearers able to reveal the implied meaning behind their utterances. Since it is called flouting maxims, obviously, the number of flouting is classified as many as the number of maxims itself (Cutting, 2002); that is flouting maxim of quantity (the speakers appear to give less information or more information more than required), flouting maxim of quality (the speakers appear to say something which is not true and contains inadequate evidence), flouting maxim of relevance (the speakers appear to give irrelevant contribution in order to avoid the topic being talked) and flouting maxim of manner (the speakers appear to give unclear and ambiguous response in order to exclude the third party).

Relating to the phenomenon above, people often flouted the maxims because they have certain purpose, including humor. Vandaele (2007, p. 147) defines humor as something that causes an unintentional smile or a laughter on people. He further explained that humor is an important aspect that bring the amusement in the conversation, which is make it one of the most defining aspects of humanity. Soedjatmiko (1992, p. 70) that humor can be achieved by manipulating some rules in conversation, hence people would not feel it as a conflict when stating humor, besides it reduces the tension during the conversation. However, humor seems hard to understand because it is tied to the social and the cultural background of the language user.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting this research, the writers used a qualitative method, which focused on the content analysis. The writers analyzed and interpreted one of the recorded materials, called movie. The data for this qualitative research were collected from the utterances produced by Alfi character containing flouting maxim in *The Guys* movie.

*The Guys* is an Indonesian comedy movie released in 2017. It was directed by Raditya Dika and also written by himself, Donny Dhiantoro and Sunil Soraya. The main cast in this movie named Alfi, which is played by the director of the movie itself, Raditya Dika. In this movie, Alfi is an employee who works in a creative agency and aspires to be the boss for his own company.

According to Andresen (2013) in order to create comedy genre movie, the conversational maxims were flouted. Thus, comedy movie tends to offer plentiful selective conversations needed in this study; there must be frequent amount of flouting maxim that can be obtained from *The Guys* movie. Moreover, it is a recent

Indonesian comedy movie. It is known that there are already numerous studies about flouting maxim in foreign movie, whereas the studies about flouting maxims in Indonesian/local movies are still lacking.

The data were obtained by watching the movie and transcribing the movie script to ensure that no data were accidentally left out. After obtaining and collecting the fixed data, the data were classified based on the purpose of this research and analyzed qualitatively based on the recommended theories. Furthermore, the writers re-checked all the data to ensure that all the data matched and accurately-translated.

#### 4. FINDINGS

The results of the data collection and analysis show that Alfi character indeed flouts all the Grice's maxims, they are quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. The Types of Flouting Maxims Performed by Alfi Character in The Guys Movie

No.	Types of Flouting Maxims	Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Quantity	19	27%
2.	Quality	18	26%
3.	Relevance	12	17%
4.	Manner	21	30%
Total		<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on Table 1, all types of conversational maxims are flouted by Alfi character in the movie. Maxim of manner is the most-flouted type of maxim with 21 occurrences, followed by quantity with 19 occurrences, quality 18 with occurrences, and the least-flouted type of maxim is relevance with only 12 occurrences. Furthermore, the results also show that Alfi character intentionally flout all of these maxims in order to achieve certain purposes of his communication with other characters. The next table displays the results for the reason of flouting maxims performed by the character in the movie:

Table 2. The Reasons of Flouting Maxims Performed by Alfi Character in The Guys Movie

No.	Reasons of Flouting Maxims	Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Competitive	18	26%
2.	Convivial	12	17%
3.	Collaborative	30	43%
4.	Conflictive	10	14%
Total		<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on Table 2, all of the Leech's illocutionary functions are becoming the reasons of flouting maxims done by Alfi character in the movie. The most-often

reason of flouting maxims found in the movie is collaborative with 30 occurrences, it is nearly a half of total data found, followed by competitive with 18 occurrences, convivial with 12 occurrences, and the least reason of flouting maxim is conflictive with only 10 occurrences. To provide more detailed explanation about the results, the writers presented some data which will be described as follows:

#### 4.1 Flouting Maxim of Manner

Maxim of manner is the most-flouted type of maxim with 21 occurrences, this happens because Alfi character is mostly trying to avoid saying something blatantly; sometimes he just wanted to hide what he felt or what happened to the hearers. Moreover, his utterances in conversation were mostly perspicuous because he often experienced the unexpected situations which forced him to speak ambiguously and disorderly in front of the hearer. A study conducted by Burhan (2013) also revealed that flouting maxim of manner was performed because the character wanted to show his feeling indirectly. Flouting maxim of manner occurs in many conversations in this movie. The following example is taken from our data:

DL-08 [07:39-07:44]	[Rene]	[Rene]
	Kenapa muka lo?	What's wrong with your face?
	[Alfi]	[Alfi]
	Udah abis.	It's over.
	[Rene]	[Rene]
	Apanya udah abis?	What's over?

The dialogue in DL-08 happened at an expensive Italian restaurant when Rene and Alfi had their couple dinner with Shifa and Via. Rene already set up this dinner because he had several free vouchers to eat at that restaurant. Then, Alfi was secretly asking the waiter whether the vouchers still available. Unfortunately, it was no longer available, he was worried, then Rene noticed his expression and asked what has happened. Here, Alfi failed to fulfill maxim of manner which requires him to provide a clear answer to Rene's question. He did this due to avoid the inclusion of the third parties, Shifa and Via. Moreover, his expression was also obscure, it can be proved by Rene's next question. Furthermore, the confusion that arose in this dialogue create humorous effect and cause a laughter.

In terms of reason behind this flouting, the social goal was that Alfi wanted to inform Rene that his vouchers could not be purchased anymore. Whereas the illocutionary goal was that Alfi intended to make Rene's understand this situation without making the girls noticed about it. As a result, Alfi's illocutionary goal collaborated with his social goal. Therefore, the reason of flouting maxim found in this dialogue is classified as collaborative.

## 4.2 Flouting of Maxim Quantity

In this movie, the maxim of quantity was flouted 19 times by Alfi character. It is identified as the second most-flouted type of maxim because the character often talked actively to give more explanation which was not actually needed in the conversation. Hanna, Sembiring, & Ghozali (2017) also found that this maxim was often flouted for the purpose of prolixity. The example of flouting maxim quantity is extracted from the following dialogue:

DL-43 [46:35-46-59]	[Pak Jeremy] Makasih sudah datang. [Alfi] Pak sekali lagi saya minta maaf Pak. [Pak Jeremy] Udah gapapa. [Alfi] Pak, kalau boleh saya mau undang Bapak sama Amira untuk makan dirumah saya Pak, kebetulan Mama saya masakannya enak banget!	[Mr. Jeremy] Thanks for coming [Alfi] Sir, I'm really sorry, Sir. [Mr. Jeremy] No problem. [Alfi] Sir, if you don't mind, I want to invite you and Amira to have lunch in my house. My mom's food surely delicious!
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The setting for DL-43 was at Amira's house. After dinner, Alfi accidentally destroyed from-generation-to-generation-painting of Amira's mom family, hence their dinner was completely ruined by his big mistake. Alfi was really feeling guilty and before going home, he spontaneously invited Mr. Jeremy and Amira to have lunch at his mom's house the next day. Here, he provided too many information when inviting them. Alfi declared that his mom food was definitely tasty, which was not required for the invitation. Therefore, this example is classified as flouting maxim of quantity. Whereas in terms of reason, the act of inviting belongs to convivial function. Therefore, the reason of this flouting is convivial.

## 4.3 Flouting Maxim of Quality

In *The Guys* movie, the data of flouting maxim quality is in the third position with 18 occurrences. Based on the analyzed data, this maxim was flouted in various ways. Most of these flouts occurred as a result of intended use of irony. It is not surprising because Alfi character was the main character considered as the good guy in the group, hence, using irony to flout maxim quality was seen as a friendly-way of being offensive which can very well be amusing and caused a laughter on the part of the audiences. Andresen (2013) on his research concluded that to create a comedy movie, the maxims were flouted, and it turned out that flouting maxim of quality in this movie indeed creates humorous effects. For further explanation, below is the example of flouting maxim quality by the character:

DL-03 [04:58-05:05]	[Rene] Lo jomblo udah berapa lama sih? [Alfi] 2 tahun.	[Rene] How long have you been single? [Alfi] 2 years.
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	<p>[Rene] Selama gue pacaran sama Shifa dong?</p> <p>[Alfi] Tapi lo kan pacarannya putus nyambung mulu.</p>	<p>[Rene] As long as I'm dating with Shifa, right?</p> <p>[Alfi] But you stuck in on-off relationship, right?</p>
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In the DL-03, Alfi and Rene were going to the toilet and talking in front of the mirrors. In the beginning of this conversation, both Rene and Alfi were very cooperative. However, when Rene responded to Alfi's answer, it turned out that Alfi has been single since Rene and his girlfriend were dating. After hearing this response, Alfi deliberately flouted the maxim of quality by using irony. Here, he expected Rene to infer the hidden meaning that being a single man for 2 years was just actually the same as Rene's situation in the past 2 years with Shifa, which was stuck in the on-again off-again relationship. Concerning the sense of humor, this data classified as the very funny one.

In terms of reason, Alfi's social goal was that he was not supposed to take Rene's statement seriously, because it was true that he has already been a single man for two years. However, the illocutionary goal was that Alfi intended to humiliate Rene. In short, his illocutionary goal competed with his social goal. Thus, the reason of flouting maxim in this dialogue is competitive.

#### 4.4 Flouting Maxim of Relevance

There were only 12 conversations where Alfi character gave irrelevant contributions to the topic being discussed. The total of flouting maxim relevance is nearly half of the flouting maxim manner result and thus makes this maxim the least flouted maxim in this movie. The chosen character flouted this maxim when he was trying to avoid the topic being discussed or when he felt uncomfortable. Similar results were also revealed by Jorfi & Dowlatabadi (2015) who found that the speakers commonly flout this maxim to prevent further discussion of the topic which was considered as bothersome. For example:

DL-12 [11:19-11:28]	<p>[Sukun] Halo! You two, pacaran?</p> <p>[Alfi] Engga, si Sukun bahasa Indonesianya masih kurang, jadi dia...</p>	<p>[Sukun] Hello! Are you two dating?</p> <p>[Alfi] No, Sukun's ability in using bahasa Indonesia is still bad, so he...</p>
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DL-12 happened at the office party. Via and Alfi were going to eat some food and suddenly Sukun came and asked a sensitive question related to Alfi's relationship with Via. Hearing this question, Via constantly showed a disgustedly surprised expression. After that, Alfi intentionally flouted maxim of relevance since his



response to Sukun's question was irrelevant. Alfi did this because he wanted to avoid talking about his relationship with Via, because in the movie it was shown that Via was not showing any affection to Alfi, while Alfi was feeling over confident with Via's way of treating him. The situation in this conversation is very well amusing.

The social goal was that Alfi was supposed to answer the question given by Sukun, or at least he should clarify that he was not dating Via. Whereas, the illocutionary goal was Alfi wanted to cause offence, so Sukun's question would be sidetracked. In short, the illocutionary goal conflicted with the social goal. Therefore, the reason of flouting maxim found in this utterance is conflictive.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The objective of this study was to identify the types of maxims floated and to find out the reasons for floating the maxim by Alfi character in movie *The Guys*. The results show that all types of maxims, i.e. quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, were floated. However, maxims of manner, quantity, and quality were floated more often than that of relevance. The fact that maxim of manner to be the most frequently floated maxim is a surprising result. In other movies, researchers found that maxim of quality was most often floated (Arto, 2015; Affifatusholihah & Setyawan, 2016, pp. 114-115; Evitayani, Sosiowati, & Winaya, 2016), and the same applies to children movies such as *The Jungle Book* (Sembiring & Ghozali, 2017) and *Fungfu Panda* (Hamani & Puluhalawa, 2019). Contrast between the types of maxim floated in this research and previous research, which is mostly in English reveals that maxim floated in English is different to that in Indonesia.

In addition, this study also revealed some interesting results. This study analyzed maxim floating in an Indonesian comedy movie, which was obviously different in all aspects from some previous studies which used English movies. It can be seen in the data analysis that every time Alfi character flouted maxim of manner (the most-flouted maxim), it could cause a laughter on the part of the audience. Therefore, it can be assumed that Indonesian comedy movie often flouted maxim of manner to create humorous effect. However, in English comedy movies such as *Deadpool* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Irjayanti (2018) and Puspitaningrum (2013) found that it was the maxim of quantity which was floated to create humor effect. This result emphasizes the difference of maxim floating between Indonesian and English.

Furthermore, this study also showed an unexpected result concerning flouting maxim of relevance. Purwanto (2008) concluded that maxim of relevance was the most-flouted maxim. On the contrary, this study showed that maxim of relevance was the least-flouted maxim. This may be happened due to the genre of the movie chosen. Purwanto (2008) analyzed the romance movie, whereas this study dealt with comedy movie. A fairly logical reason was that maxim relevance was indeed mostly flouted in romance movies because the conversation between two lovers were often

deliberately made to be irrelevant for the purpose of getting one's attention to be more sensitive about their lovers, in this case, Jack to Rose, in Titanic movie. Whereas Alfi character in The Guys movie rarely flouted this maxim because he was a single-man which has a bad love story. Therefore, he only flouted this maxim for the purpose of avoiding the topic which made him uncomfortable.

Another objective of this research was to find out the reasons for floating maxims in Indonesian comedy movie The Guys. Based on the analysis, collaborative function was the most frequent reason for floating the maxims. According to Leech (1983), collaborative function happens when both speaker and listener engaged in exchanging information to get an understanding, hence, both politeness and impoliteness value are equal here. Therefore, it can be concluded that floating maxims can be used as a way to show politeness by Indonesian speakers. However, in English, collaborative function to show politeness was not one of the reasons for floating maxims, as found by Fatmawati (2015).

Since this research is a qualitative research, the results were not intended to generalize to the context outside the scope of this research. However, they can be used as a preliminary study to qualitatively predict how maxims are floated, along with the motivation to float them, in Indonesian to create humor effect. This prediction should be made with caution because only one movie was used as the sample. Further research can be conducted using adequate sample size to enable quantitative analysis, which can be confidentially used to generalize how maxims are floated by Indonesian speakers.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In relation to the first objective of this research, it can be concluded that in The Guys movie, the main character flouts all types of maxims. Maxim manner was the most-flouted types of maxim with 30% occurrences. The second most-flouted type of maxim was quantity which equals 27%. The third most-flouted type of maxim was quality with 26% occurrences. The least-flouted type of maxim was relevance, which statistically equals 17%.

In relation to the second objective of this study, there were four reasons that led the main character to flout all types of maxims in the movie. They were competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive reason. In the movie, collaborative reason was in the highest position as a reason of flouting maxims. The total of this reason equals 43%. The second often reason that led Alfi to flout the maxims was competitive reason with 26% occurrences. The third reason was convivial, which statistically equals 17%. The least reason of flouting maxim was conflictive reason with only 14% occurrences.

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